HISTORY THROUGH THE AGES

SECOND SERIES BOOK 4

BRITISH INSTITUTIONS

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HISTORY THROUGH THE AGES

EACH book should make the basis of history lessons for a year. In the Teacher's Book which accompanies the first series, there are detailed suggestions for ways in which the text can give rise to class and individual activities, so that each chapter becomes the starting point for two or three weeks' effective work.

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SECOND SERIES BOOK 4

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BRITISH INSTITUTIONS

By
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and
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Drawings by
CLARKE HUTTON

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PREFATORY NOTE

In our book you will learn a good deal about Billingham village and Ladyborough town in Cherry Tree Hundred in Linfordshire. But if you turn up a map of England you will not find Ladyborough or Linfordshire or Cherry Tree Hundred or Billingham just as we are imagining them. There are, however, any number of real places just like the places we are going to describe to you.

Every one of the forty ancient English counties is in some ways much like Linfordshire, every one of some 900 Hundreds is like the Hundred of Cherry Tree, and every one of about 9,000 old villages has in its story something of the history of Billingham. Similarly, every one of about 700 old towns has a history not altogether unlike that of Ladyborough.

Whatever part of England you live in, whether in town or country, so long as you dwell anywhere in England, the story of Billingham and Linfordshire and Ladyborough will help you in working out the history of your own village or town. That in fact is what it is meant to do.

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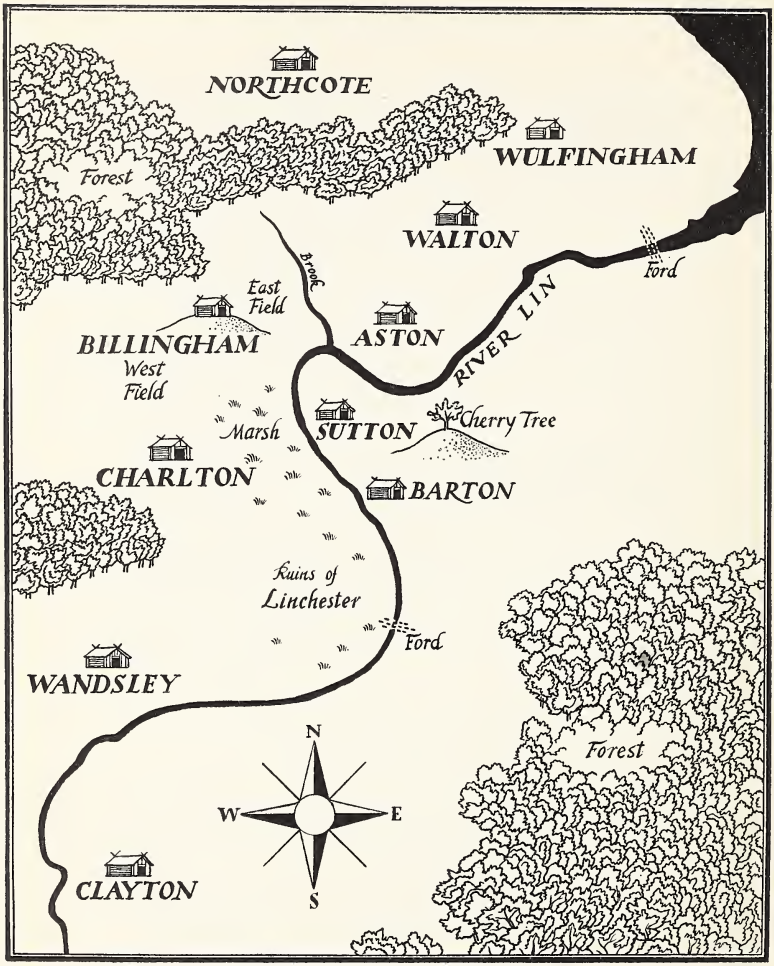
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The first settlements in Linfordshire

SECTION 1

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING OF ENGLAND

THE English people came to Britain in instalments, beginning about 1,500 years ago. They emigrated from northern Germany, perhaps because they were becoming overcrowded there, or because their enemies were pressing them hard, or because they thought they could find better land across the seas; perhaps for a mixture of all these and other reasons.

The people who then lived in Britain, the Britons, had been under Roman rule for about four centuries. But in the 4th century the Roman Empire was being attacked on every side. In consequence, the Romans withdrew their garrisons from the outlying parts of their Empire, such as Britain, in order to defend lands nearer Rome, the heart of the Empire. So by the 5th century the Britons were left to defend themselves from their enemies. They might have made a better defence had they not quarrelled so much among themselves. In the north the Picts and Scots flooded over the great wall the Emperor Hadrian had built, and in the west they made landings on the coast. Then tribes of heathen English from Germany began to attack the east coast and to sail up the rivers, burning, looting, and murdering.

The Britons in despair thought that perhaps they could set the one group of their enemies, the Anglo-Saxons or English, to drive out the others, the Picts and Scots. The English tribes were willing to do this because they wanted to settle in Britain themselves—indeed, a few English families had already settled. So the British found that they had only exchanged one enemy for another: there

was a mass immigration of English, and in time they killed or enslaved or drove out most of the unhappy Britons.

It took more than 150 years for the English tribes to spread over and conquer the greater part of what is now England. They had a great set-back at the Battle of Mount Badon, possibly near Bath, about 500, when the British king, Arthur, is supposed to have defeated them. In 577, however, an English king, Ceawlin, won a great victory at Dyrham (a place near Bristol), and another king, Ethelfrith, won another victory at Chester in 613. In course of time Britain became known as Angle-land or England.

It is important to remember that the English conquest of England was not at all like the Roman conquest of Britain, or indeed the English conquest of Wales or Ireland, or the Norman conquest of England. In each of these the conquerors became rulers or landlords, while the conquered people remained to till the land, to pay their taxes, and to do as they were told. The English conquest was much more like the Jewish conquest of Palestine in Old Testament times, or the American settlers' conquest of the Red Indians. There were two peoples, each of them wanting the same land, and the result was a long series of fierce wars, in which the losers suffered very heavily. The English had come not to rule the Britons, but to take their land, whether by killing them, or driving them out, or enslaving them.

Doubtless the English war-bands consisted only of men bringing a little food and some spare weapons. But as soon as definite patches of territory had been conquered, later immigrants would bring their wives and children, their household goods, jewellery and ornaments, their ploughs, their horses and oxen, sheep and swine. They had left their own country for good and had come to stay, as indeed, they have stayed—now for nearly 1,500 years.

What sort of people were they? They could not read or write, so

they have left no written records of their doings. One or two British writers describe them, but naturally their record is not favourable. One of these says that their name is accursed, and calls them wolves in the sheepcotes.

They had many characteristics not unlike those of modern Englishmen: they tended to be tall and fair and blue-eyed; they liked sport and feasting and beer-drinking; they loved animals, especially dogs and horses; they much preferred living in the country to life in the town. Indeed, the English were first-rate practical farmers; instead of cultivating the barren hill-sides, as many of the Britons had done, they set about clearing the forests and draining the marshes in the valleys, knowing that in this way they could get much better crops, even though hard work would be necessary at first.

They showed another trait still recognizable in modern Englishmen. In peace-time they resented discipline and control, and every one of them tended to do what best pleased him; but in war-time they found it easy to act unitedly until the enemy was defeated. Then, peace being established, they would return happily to their own affairs and their private quarrels. It was this ability to unite against an enemy which perhaps more than anything else brought about the defeat of the British, who were not good at acting together.

The English were not Christians, as many of the Britons were. They worshipped the gods of German mythology, such as Woden and Thunor, and they looked upon heroism in battle as the greatest of virtues. Christianity did not reach them until the end of the 6th century, when missionaries from Rome came to Kent. Later in the 7th century Irish missionaries from the British settlement in the island of Iona came to Northumbria.

CHAPTER 2

THE STORY OF BILLINGHAM

PERHAPS about A.D. 500 a tribe of these English invaders founded the village of Billingham. Probably they were called Billings because their leader was named Billa, and Billingham means 'the home of the Billings'. Very probably some of the young men had come on in advance and shared in the fighting. Then perhaps Billa had gone back to Germany to report that some land had been conquered, and that now it was safe for the women and children and the older men to come over and establish the settlement. So under his captaincy they left their homes in Germany in a long, narrow ship, with one bank of oars and a single sail, and they sailed and rowed across the North Sea. The vessel was loaded to the gunwale with men, women, and children, food, farm stock, seed corn, and implements. Billa guided the vessel safely up the River Lin to the place which he had chosen for the main body to meet the advance-guard. We may be sure there was great rejoicing and much beer-drinking at the reunion, and many songs about how the brave English had beaten the Britons.

Then perhaps the immigrants resumed their journey, up the River Lin and past the ford where now stands the town of Linford. As they went further and further up the river they exchanged greetings with their friends and relatives who were settling round about, building wooden houses, digging wells, cutting down trees, and ploughing the ground. At last they came to a part of the river where the settlements were spread more thinly. There was land and to spare here for anyone who wanted it. But in some places the land was too marshy, in others the forest was too thick, or other settlements were too near.

Then at last they found the very spot they were looking for. By



The ships of the English invaders

a bend in the river there was a rich, flat plain just safely above river level. Beyond it was a gravel hillock coming quite close to the river. On either side of this there were gentle slopes of rich marl land, stretching away to the horizon and facing southwards, so they would get plenty of sunshine. Beyond these to the north lay a dense patch of woodland.

Billa and his friends were quite satisfied to stay here. The gravel hillock above the flood level would make an ideal site for the village. The plain was a natural meadow. The gentle slopes would make good cornland. The woodland would give timber for the houses and food for the swine. There was no need to go any farther. So the boat was tied up to the bank, and the stock were set to graze, while the young men hastily ran up a wooden stockade round the summit of the hillock to give protection against wolves from the forests or attacks from Britons. The first night or two everyone slept in the ship for security; but as soon as the stockade

was finished, a few simple huts made of boughs and branches were put together as temporary houses. The Billings had founded the 'township' of Billingham.

There was no need to trouble about the limits of the Billingham lands. To the east the river made a natural boundary. Up the river the Harlings at Clayton had another settlement 16 miles away. Down the river the nearest neighbours were the Wulfings at Wulfingham. Inland no one knew or cared what lay beyond the great woodland. It was enough that in the middle of the unoccupied land, between the river and marsh to the south, the wood to the north-west, the brook to the north-east, there lay perhaps 1,200 acres of good land, enough to meet all the needs of the Billings for many a day.

For more than a hundred years after their first landing the main business of the Billingham folk was to look after this land. They must bring it under the plough and keep it in good cultivation. They must feed their cattle on the pasture and their swine in the forest. Then there would be plenty of bread, and beer, and beef, and bacon for themselves, and their pretty, fair-haired wives, and their sturdy, blue-eyed children.

CHAPTER 3

BILLINGHAM TOWNSHIP AND THE FOLK MOOT

As time went on, the population of Billingham township increased. Soon, instead of the original settlement of half a dozen families, there were perhaps twenty, each with its own house, and each wanting land and more land. All over England the population was growing. The old settlements had more people, and in the spare ground between them new villages had grown up. There was no longer plenty of land to spare, as once there had been. Up the river between Billingham and Clayton there were now settlements at the Free Farmers' Place (Charlton) and at Woden's Glade (Wandsley); down the river, before reaching Wulfingham, there was a new village at the East Farm (Aston). At the foreigners' settlement (Walton) a few surviving Britons had been allowed to live on condition that they stayed quiet and paid a tribute to the Billings and the Wulfings.

As most of these settlements were still growing rapidly, competition was keen for what little land was left. Much more definite boundaries had to be agreed upon between each township and its neighbour. (This is the origin of the boundaries of the land governed by Billingham Parish Council today.)

Within the new boundaries the land had to be used more economically. At first, the people of Billingham had cultivated afresh 200–300 acres each year or second year, reaped their crop, burnt the straw in the stalk, and then left this patch of soil for perhaps eight or ten years while they tilled other pieces. But as the number of people increased, there was not enough arable land to do this any more. More pasture land was also needed, for some of it had been ploughed up to extend the cornfields, and the rest was carrying more sheep and cattle than it could feed properly. There

was not enough meadow to produce hay to feed the stock through the winter. Even timber in the forest and fish in the river were becoming scarce. The people began to realize that unless these basic problems were faced, they might soon be no better off than their ancestors had been in Germany.

The English in Billingham and elsewhere had very early discovered that difficult questions could best be settled by discussion, perhaps followed by a kind of vote of all concerned. This is how they had first decided that Billingham was the right place for their village. These new problems they settled in the same way at their folk moot, or 'meeting of the people', which was, perhaps, in some ways not very different from a modern parish meeting.

Perhaps they tackled the main problem first—that of the arable land. They had found by experiment that their land was good enough to grow a crop every other year. They decided, therefore, to divide the arable area into two halves, and agreed that these should be cropped in alternate years. These halves were the great 'open fields' of Billingham—huge fields of several hundred acres each, in which each household in the settlement had some land.

There was the East Field, which lay out towards Aston, and the West Field, which almost touched one of the fields of Charlton. In the year when the East Field was being cropped, the West Field would lie fallow (take a rest), and vice versa. The stock would graze the land which was resting to recover its fertility—and this not only provided extra pasture but also manured the field.

Soon they found that there had to be some rules. No man could let his stock into the field to graze on the stubble until all had cleared their harvest, or the remaining corn would soon be destroyed. If one villager was late in reaping his corn, all his neighbours had to wait for him. This was a problem for the moot. The moot decided that the cattle could be let in when the last man but

one had reaped his crop—a shrewd decision which made the last one hurry to gather his harvest before the animals could eat his corn.

The division of the meadow was a difficult problem, for there was not enough good meadow land, and some bits were much better than others. The meadow had been divided into strips, all more or less equal in size, and each a fair day's mowing. With the moot's approval a custom grew up of distributing these annually by lot among all the villagers. Any man might get one or two bad strips, but it was not likely that he would draw all the bad ones. And if he was unfortunate this year, he might hope to be luckier for the next hay harvest.

Then there was the common pasture to deal with. At first, all the land-holders had roughly equal pasture rights. Each family was allowed to graze its plough oxen and, say, four milk cows as well. But the moot agreed that a villager, if he wished, might keep a horse and a few sheep instead of some of the cows.

The moot could also deal with petty offences. If Edwy had neglected his share of hedging the pasture, so that Alfred's cows had strayed and damaged Wulflaf's corn, who was to stand the loss, Wulflaf, or Alfred, or Edwy? The moot had to decide who was most at fault, and might decide that the damage should be made good by Edwy, for he was at fault. In this way the moot became a minor court of justice for the township.

The folk moot of Billingham could not deal, however, with a dispute between a Billingham man and one of the dwellers in Charlton, since the Charlton people would never agree to this. The Billingham men, on the other hand, would not trust the decision of the Charlton folk moot. So a more important meeting was needed to deal with questions of this kind. It was found in the Hundred moot.

CHAPTER 4

CHERRY TREE HUNDRED AND LINFORDSHIRE

No one quite knows why Hundreds are so called. Possibly at first a Hundred was a district contributing a hundred warriors to the army. Certainly much of Germany had been divided into Hundreds of this kind. And if long ago there had been on the average ten families to a township and about ten townships to a Hundred, the Hundred would be well so called.

However this may be, it is certain that from very early times the men of Billingham and some eight to twelve other little townships met together about every four weeks to settle matters of common concern. Their meeting-place was an old gnarled cherry-tree, on a hillock in a convenient central position in their area. Hence their Hundred came to be called Cherry Tree Hundred, as indeed it still is. Many Hundreds take their names from some natural feature, a hill, tree, cliff, or grove, at the spot which our ancestors chose as the place of assembly of their Hundred moot. (The Cherry Tree Parliamentary Division of Linfordshire is, therefore, the name still given to the area for which Colonel Geoffrey Swinton, whom the people of this part of Linfordshire chose as their M.P. at the last election, is said to sit in Parliament.) If the folk moot was something like a present-day parish meeting, the Hundred moot was a little like a modern Rural District Council, except that every freeman, not just a few elected representatives, had the right and the duty of attending. The Hundred moot could deal with much more important business than the little local folk moot. For example, it could try criminals. In later years King Canute ordered that no case should be brought before the king unless it had first been heard in the Hundred moot.

Every four weeks, therefore, the freemen of Billingham, Aston,



The Hundred Moot

Wandsley, Charlton, and the other little townships, equipped with their arms—their swords, axes, and shields—trooped off to Cherry Tree Hill. (This is why in some of the Danish parts of England, especially Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, the Hundred is still called a Wapentake—'weapon touch'.) The arms at the Hundred moot were not wholly for defence; the freemen at the Hundred moot showed their approval by brandishing their swords in the air, or beating with the pommels the metal bosses of their shields.

In early times when little kingdoms were being established all over England, each kingdom was thought of rather as made up of so many Hundreds than of so many shires—the divisions of the country which we now use. For the first kingdoms were no bigger than some of our present-day shires. They were ruled by kings, many of whom were the descendants of the original pirate leaders. Then these many little kingdoms began gradually to join together, perhaps for defence, to make seven main kingdoms. Later these also amalgamated until there were only three, Northumbria, Mercia, and Wessex. Each of these three in turn was the leading kingdom, until in the end Wessex became the chief one. After the Battle of Ellendun, Egbert King of Wessex became in 829 something like a first King of England. Queen Elizabeth II is his great-great-(36 greats altogether)-grand-daughter.

This helps to explain why the shires—counties—of England have such very different origins. Some of them, especially in the south-east, such as Kent and Essex, are early kingdoms. Those in Wessex—Dorset, Wiltshire, and so on—are probably the districts once ruled by lesser kings, subject to the great kings of Wessex. Those in the East Midlands record the holdings of Danish armies. Those of the West Midlands mark successive patches of territory reconquered from the Danes by King Alfred's descendants.

Now our Linfordshire is in the east Midlands, so we may suppose



Anglo-Saxon England

it to have begun as the district held by a Danish army, which invaded England and conquered Cherry Tree and half a dozen Hundreds in the middle of the 9th century, and governed them from its camp at Linford. (That, in fact, is why Linford is the county town today, why the Shire Hall and the Assize Court are there, why the Education Committee has its office there, and so on.) After the land had been reconquered from the Danes, Linfordshire remained a shire, as it still is.

In later Old English days a shire moot was held at Linford, its main sittings being twice a year. This was as much above the Hundred moot in power as that was above the folk moot. In it there sat side by side the Bishop of Linford, the chief representative of the Church, and the Alderman (or as the Danes preferred to call him the Earl), the king's officer in the shire. There also came, not all freemen as to the other moots, but representatives—the reeve (headman) and four villagers—from Billingham and from every other township in the shire. The shire moot dealt with both crimes and disputes, and it helped to collect the King's taxes and his other revenues. In a way we can regard it as the ancestor of the Linfordshire County Council, the Linfordshire Court of Quarter Sessions, and several other local institutions which still have their centres in Linford town.

For the present it will be enough to remember that long before the Norman Conquest the little townships like Billingham had been grouped in Hundreds, that several—anywhere from four to sixty or seventy—Hundreds made up a shire, and that folk moot, Hundred moot, and shire moot governed these three different units. These townships, Hundreds, and shires, set out by our English ancestors perhaps some 1,200 to 1,500 years ago, are plain to see on the map of England today.

CHAPTER 5

THE PARISH OF ST. PETER'S, BILLINGHAM

As we know, when the English first came and settled in Britain they were heathens—worshippers of Woden and Thunor and other heathen gods. The names of these gods and of some of the heathen customs and festivals survived in their language, and some of them remain in ours. The Old English names of the months commemorated heathen festivals: their name for February, Cake Month, may have commemorated the festival of offering cakes to the gods, September was Holy or Offering Month, and November was called the Month of Sacrifice. Our names for the days of the week have descended directly from those used by our heathen ancestors—Tuesday, Tiw's day; Friday, the day of the goddess Frig; and so on. Many English place-names record the names of gods—especially Woden, Thunor, and Tiw. Woden, from whom most Old English kings claimed descent, is commemorated, for example, in Wednesday and Wednesfield in Staffordshire, Wensley in Derbyshire, our imaginary Wandsley near Billingham, and others.

When the English came, many of the Britons were already Christians, for the Romans had brought Christianity to Britain. But the English were too busy fighting and driving out the British to learn about their religion. The first people to bring Christianity to the English came to Kent from Rome in 597, and a little later, in 634, some Celtic missionaries from Iona, off the coast of Scotland, came to Northumbria.

Let us see how the Christian religion came to the people of Billingham. Some time—when, we do not know—the separate settlements on the banks of the River Lin had become united into little kingdoms. These kingdoms were constantly changing their boundaries as the kings won or lost in their continual battles with

their neighbours, but still they were real kingdoms, and they had moots of the wise men to advise the king whenever he had a difficult problem. At some time in the 7th century, when the kingdoms were becoming fewer and larger, a heathen king might marry a princess from another kingdom which had already been converted to Christianity. Then when she came to her new home, the princess would bring a priest with her, so that she and her companions could continue to follow their faith. The priest, when once he was established at the king's court, would perhaps be allowed to build a church in the capital town. Then he would persuade the king and his wise men of the moot to listen while he told the story of Christ. If the king and the wise men became Christians, they would give the priest permission to go out or to send out another priest as a missionary throughout the little kingdom, and to teach the people about Christ.

So this is how a priest came at last to Billingham. The people there had heard of him—they knew he was a friend of their king and queen, and they knew that their neighbours at Aston and Charlton had already had a visit from him, and that some of them had been baptized by him in the river. He was an Englishman, like themselves, and he spoke their tongue. He played on the harp in the way they dearly loved, but he altered the old songs of war and bloodshed so that instead of telling how men fought and killed each other, they described in vivid language how our Lord fought and beat the Devil.

Then the priest called a meeting of the villagers and asked them on which side they wanted to fight in this warfare. Most of them agreed to give up the old ways and become soldiers of Christ; when he explained how baptism would make them soldiers in Christ's army, they asked to be baptized—they, their wives, and their children.

At first the people of Billingham used to go over from time to time to the little wooden 'minster' church which a group of half a dozen priests had built at Wandsley—perhaps on the very spot where formerly in November the flesh of cattle had been offered to the heathen god Woden. Sometimes a priest came over to Billingham from Wandsley and said Mass in the open air, where the cross is now on the village green. (That, in fact, is why it was first placed there.) Sometimes he would spend a few days in Billingham, visiting the sick and saying Mass each day. Also he would come over whenever a couple wanted to be married, or there was a baby to be christened, or a person to be buried.

He taught the people the Church's rules. Some of these rules went against the customs which the English had long been accustomed to. For instance, among the English in heathen times it was a custom that after his father's death a man might marry his stepmother. The Church taught that this was wrong, and established laws of marriage which are followed to this day. The heathen English had been in the habit of paying a certain proportion (often perhaps a tenth part) of the produce of the land to the priests of Woden and Thunor and Frig. Now, the Church taught that this 'tithe' should be paid to a Christian priest.

The people of Billingham soon began to wish to have a church and priest of their own; but it was not for a long time, perhaps not until about the year 800, that they were able to build their own church. When finally St. Peter's Church, Billingham, was built, it was not only because the Billingham folk were enthusiastic about their religion and did not like going all the way to Wandsley, but also partly because Edric, the richest 'churl' or farmer in the village, was ambitious.

By this time there were rich and poor people in Billingham, but there was no 'thane' or man of rank above that of his neighbours.



Anglo-Saxons building a church

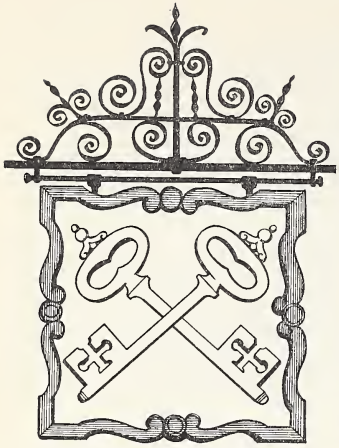
Edric, the richest of the churls, hoped that he might become a thane; he had all the qualifications to be one, except that there was not on his land a church with its own bellcote. So Edric told his neighbours that he would give the land for a church and churchyard, and that his men should do half the building if they would do the rest. The other Billingham folk agreed. Edric gave a piece of land on the spot where in heathen times the village women might have made their sacrifices to Frig in Cake Month. The priests of Wandsley agreed that Billingham should build its own church, so work was begun.

The church was built of wood—the walls were of tree-trunks set upright like a fence, with moss and clay packed in the chinks. It had an earthen floor, only one door, and very tiny windows. It had a bellcote from which the bell could ring to call Christian people to worship, and it had a font for christening the babies. Later a graveyard was marked out, so that the people might be

buried in consecrated ground. The church was in two sections, the nave or western part for the layfolk of Billingham, and the chancel or eastern part for the priest. At the far east end there was a stone altar, where the priest could say Mass every Sunday and saint's day.

It was agreed that Edric should choose the priest, for he had done more than anyone else to get the church built. (That is why to this day Col. Swinton chooses the vicar of Billingham.) Edric chose Leofric, a cousin of his, who was a priest. When the church was finished, Edric and a deputation of Billingham folk went to the bishop at Linford to ask him to hallow the church and to set Leofric the priest about the performance of his duties. But the bishop said that before he would agree to this, he must know that Leofric would be properly paid.

Some of the tithe and other offerings which had been given to the priests at Wandsley would now be transferred to Billingham. Then the priest at Billingham must have a share of the farm-land in the place, perhaps one strip in every ten. (This is how the vicar of Billingham comes to own the 'glebe' to this day.) There were other offerings too, some of them voluntary, some compulsory, which the people promised to pay to their priest—'plough alms' (a penny for each plough) at Easter, 'church scot', a sort of land tax usually paid in corn, and 'soulscot' (part of each man's goods offered to the Church after his death by his open grave). The most important of these offerings came to be the payment to the priest of one-tenth of all the corn, beans, hay, and wood produced in Billingham, all the wool grown, and all the calves, lambs, piglets, and chickens reared each year. The vicar of Billingham still receives a cash payment each year which represents in money the tithes of wool and of animals—indeed, this 'tithe rent charge' is what makes up the greater part of the vicar's stipend.



The sign at the Cross Keys Inn

When the people agreed to pay all these, the bishop fixed a day for the hallowing. This was a great festival in Billingham. The bell rang in the bellcote, calling the folk from far and near, and all the people of Billingham, as well as many others from neighbouring villages, came to the church.

The bishop asked the people which of God's saints they would choose as 'patron' of their church. He reminded them that the date was Lammas Day (1 August) the Feast of St. Peter, a great saint, who was, he said, the first Bishop of Rome—and so all the people of Billingham agreed that their church should be dedicated to God and St. Peter. Billingham parish is therefore called St. Peter's, and the patronal festival is still held on 1 August. One of the inns at Billingham is called the Cross Keys, and the children at Billingham school have a red badge with two golden keys on it, because the golden keys are the badge of St. Peter.

The boundaries between Billingham parish and its neighbours were very much the same as the boundaries which had been agreed on in quite a different way for Billingham township—the river between Billingham and Sutton, the brook between Billingham and Aston, the marsh between Billingham and Charlton, and in the north the border of the great wood which divided Billingham from Northcote some miles away. In fact, Billingham parish was Billingham township from another point of view.

To this day the churchpeople who live within these boundaries

mostly come to worship at St. Peter's Church, Billingham. Everyone within these boundaries pays his rates through Billingham parish, and has a vote for Billingham Parish Council at the parish meeting, and polls at Billingham school when there is a parliamentary or county council election. And so St. Peter's Parish, Billingham, is still very important, not only because it is the area of land set aside nearly 1,200 years ago for Leofric the priest to care for and minister to its people, but also in worship and government and administration today.

CHAPTER 6

THE COMING OF THE NORMANS

By the end of the 8th century much of England had settled down peacefully and was growing prosperous. Many of the villages, like Billingham, had built themselves churches. Throughout the country the folk moots, Hundred moots, and shire moots kept law and order, and on the whole they kept it fairly well. In all the villages a few people had prospered as well as Edric had in Billingham, and had become 'gentlemen' or thanes; others remained as freemen owning their own land; while many had not prospered, and had had to give up some of their freedom for the sake of protection against their enemies.

In 793 trouble again began to come to England. The first of the Northmen, or Vikings, from Norway and Denmark, began to land on the east and south coasts, first in raiding parties, but later, as the English themselves had done, to settle. For a time Alfred, the great king of Wessex, helped to unite England against the invaders. He taught the English to build better ships and to go out to meet their enemies on the sea, and on land he defeated the Danes at a great battle at Edington in Wiltshire in 878. Under Alfred and his successors the kings of Wessex became recognized as the kings of all England.

Towards the end of the 10th century, when England had a weak, foolish king, Ethelred the Unready, there was another great invasion of Danes. This time many of them settled in England, and for a time, after Ethelred's death, their king, Canute, became king of England.

When the Northmen first began to invade England, they also invaded other countries, and many of them settled in northern France, in a land they called Normandy. Their leader became the

duke of Normandy. The Normans grew strong and powerful. In the 11th century they were ruled by a very strong and ambitious leader, Duke William. This Duke William was second cousin to the English King Edward, and he was determined to succeed him as king of England.

Edward was a weak king, and the most powerful men in England were Earl Godwin and his son Harold. In the year 1066 Edward died, and the meeting of wise men, the 'Witenagemot', chose Harold to succeed him. William was furious, and at once prepared to invade England and to seize the throne. In September 1066, with an army of Norman knights and their followers, he landed on the Sussex coast near Hastings.

Harold, though he was king, could not depend upon a united country to defend itself against an invasion. Some of the powerful English earls, such as Edwin and Morcar in the North and the Midlands and Harold's own brother Tostig, were jealous of him. At the same time the king of Norway had landed on the coast of Yorkshire and, helped by the traitor Tostig, began to march inland. Harold took his army up north and defeated and killed Tostig and the king of Norway at a great battle at Stamford Bridge. Then he rushed his army south again to meet William.

Harold's army was exhausted with fighting and with the long march, and he found it difficult to collect more men, for it was harvest-time, and no one wanted to leave his precious corn-lands. Only the people in the south of England, where William had landed, realized how great was their danger. Harold and his army fought a brave battle, but at the Battle of Hastings, 14 October 1066, Harold was killed and his army routed.

William then marched by a roundabout route to London, and on Christmas Day he was crowned at Westminster, in the new abbey church which King Edward had built. William had to go

on fighting for some years before he had subdued all England. With ruthless severity he destroyed all those who opposed him, teaching the English that they were really conquered. The last important rebellion was in 1070 when the brave Hereward 'the Wake' held out against him for a year in the marshy country called the Isle of Ely.

William meant to be master of England, but he did not mean to change things more than he could help, and he sought to preserve much of English laws and customs. The main change the Conquest brought in the way of life of people such as the villagers of Billingham was that they had new overlords, and everyone was a little poorer and had a little less freedom. William rewarded the Norman counts and barons, bishops and abbots, who had come over with him, by giving them the land of many of the defeated English nobles. He made everyone who held much land pay homage directly to him for it. They had to swear to be true and faithful servants of the king and to perform certain services for him, such as providing him with soldiers in time of war.

By 1086, when England had settled down under Norman rule, William was ready to make a great survey of the whole country so that he should know exactly how much land everyone held and how valuable it was. He sent royal commissioners into every shire and Hundred, and they found out who held each large piece of land, what size it was, what was its value, how many serfs, villeins, and freemen there were, how many plough teams, oxen, and pigs, how much meadow-land, forest, and common, how many mills and fish-ponds, and everything else of importance. All this information was set down in two great volumes called the Domesday Book, which remained as a permanent record of the state of England. The Domesday Book was kept at Winchester, and it may still be seen in the Public Record Office in London.

CHAPTER 7

THE MANOR OF BILLINGHAM TRACY

WHILE the English kings were defending their country against the Danes, and later while William the Conqueror was making himself master of England and giving his Norman supporters land in England, what was happening in Linfordshire and Billingham?

When bands of Danes were landing on the coasts of England through the 9th century and making raiding attacks, some of them attacked the townships in Linfordshire, and parties of Danes from their camp at Linford looted and burned some of the farms of Billingham and killed many of the people. But when the English kings reconquered Linfordshire, many of the Danes stayed and settled down peacefully. Before long they were intermarrying with English people, and in the course of a few generations they had adopted English customs and religion and, whoever their ancestors may have been, they thought of themselves as English.

Under the good rule of some of King Alfred's successors, such as his grandson Athelstan and his great-grandson Edgar, Billingham, as well as the rest of England, prospered and grew rich. Good King Edgar used to travel all over the country, seeing that his laws were kept and passing judgements on cases brought before him. We may be sure he came to Linfordshire, and most probably some of the people of Billingham saw him pass. This helped them to understand that they were part not only of Billingham and Linfordshire but also of the kingdom of England, which was growing strong and important.

When Edward the Confessor became King of England in 1041 there were two thanes in Billingham, Edred, who held much land in the village, and Oswy, a descendant of Edric, who, we remember, over 200 years before had become a thane and had helped to

build St. Peter's Church. Edred and Oswy were the biggest landowners in Billingham, and many of the other villagers had to pay them rents or services of one kind and another. They also collected the king's taxes in the township.

When in 1066 King Harold called for men to come and fight first the Danes and then the Normans, Edred's son Edmund, with many of the able-bodied men of Billingham, marched away to join Harold's army. Oswy, who was older, stayed behind with the older men to guard the township and to reap the harvest. Edmund and most of the young men of Billingham fell fighting bravely for their country at the Battle of Hastings or were hunted down by the fierce Norman cavalry. Very few found their way back to Billingham.

When King William had conquered England, he confiscated Edred's and Oswy's land and that of most of the other freemen in the village, and he handed it to one of his own Norman followers, a certain Hugh, a member of the Tracy family. Hugh 'held' this land not directly from the king but from another and more important follower of William's, Count Geoffrey (Galfridus), to whom the king granted many lands in Linfordshire, and who ruled them from a fine new castle which he began to build in Linford town.

In 1086 this is the entry which was put in William's Domesday Book: 'The Land of Count Galfridus: In Bilingeham Edred and Oswi had 10 ploughlands charged to the tax. . . . Hugo has it now. . . . There is room for 12 ploughs. He has there 2 ploughs in demesne and 10 villeins having 6 ploughs. There are 4 serfs, and there is wood for 400 swine. It was worth 40 shillings. Now it is worth 30.'

The Norman lord Hugo or Hugh soon became richer and more powerful than the thanes Edred and Oswy had ever been. He thought of the township of Billingham as his 'manor', and its

people as his people. He made them pay far more rent than they had paid before—most of it in work rather than money. In return for being allowed to stay in Billingham and cultivate what remained to them of the lands their families had occupied for over 500 years, the villagers had to work three days a week (week-work) without pay on the 'demesne', the land Hugh had set aside for himself. They also had to work extra time (boon work) at sheep-shearing, haymaking, and harvest-time. The free township of Billingham had become the manor of Billingham Tracy; Hugh was the lord of the manor; and most of its people became Hugh's 'villeins' (the word comes from a Latin word meaning farm-servants). There were very few freemen left.

Hugh's descendants, the Tracies, who were usually called Hugh or William or Geoffrey or Ralph, remained lords of Billingham for centuries—right on, in fact, till the last Tracy lord of Billingham fell fighting for King Charles I at Edgehill in 1642. When they quarrelled with neighbouring lords, as they often did, the men of Billingham had to fight for them. When any minor offence took place in the village it was tried, not as formerly in the folk moot, but in the Tracies' manorial court or court baron, held every three weeks in the hall of the manor-house. The lord of the manor or his steward acted as judge, but the lord's word was not law; he had to consult the freemen on the ancient custom of the manor. All the freemen of the village had to attend, and all the affairs of the village were managed by this court as they had been at the folk moot. To this court the villein had to come to claim his inheritance, or to ask permission for his daughter to marry or for his son to become a priest.

Hugh and his descendants made the people build a fine stone manor-house with a moat round it, instead of the wooden hall the English thanes had lived in. Many years later, over the wrought-

iron entrance gates was put the coat of arms of the Tracy family, and the same coat of arms was put by descendants of Hugh's into the church—in the windows, in the stonework, and on the fine stone and alabaster tombs and brasses in the Tracy chantry chapel which one member of the family built on to St. Peter's Church.

One of the two inns still to be seen in Billingham commemorates the Tracy family. Its sign is the 'Oyster', and an oyster is painted on its signboard; but this was originally a scallop shell, the sign used by a pilgrim. A black scallop shell on a gold ground (or, as the heralds say, 'or an escallop sable') has been the coat of arms of the Tracies ever since Geoffrey, one of the family, adopted it in 1270 after he had been on a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James at Compostella in Spain.

Soon the people of Billingham settled down under their new overlords, and in time the Tracies came to speak English instead of Norman-French and to think of themselves as Englishmen, and as 'squires' rather than as lords of the manor. The people were often proud of their squire, and sometimes even loved him. The best lords and their ladies thought of themselves as responsible for the welfare of their people, and looked after them when they were in trouble. What was happening in Billingham was happening in most of the other villages all over England; and everywhere the people gradually settled down peacefully and forgot that the ancestors of their king and their lords had been foreigners.

CHAPTER 8

LINFORDSHIRE—THE COUNTY OF LINFORD

When King William had his great Domesday Book made so that he might know who could afford to pay taxes in his new kingdom, Linfordshire, as we know, was one of the divisions he found already existing in England. William never changed things unless he had to; so he kept the division of Linfordshire with its county town and cathedral city of Linford. But he drove out the English bishop who had ruled the diocese of Linford and the English alderman or earl who had governed Linfordshire, and appointed instead a Norman bishop to rule the diocese and a Norman count to rule the shire and to see that the conquered English obeyed his laws. This count, as we know, was Geoffrey, the Count Galfridus of the Domesday Book, and Linfordshire was often called the County of Linford. Now we sometimes call it Linfordshire, sometimes the County of Linford. Count Geoffrey's descendants, however, soon began to use the old English–Danish title 'earl', though the wife of an earl to this day is called a countess.

Just as the English in Billingham had to build a manor-house for their lord Hugh, so Billingham and all the villages—Charlton, Wandsley, and the others—had to send men and stone and timber to help the townsmen of Linford to build a fine castle for Count Geoffrey on a steep hill which stood on the outskirts of Linford town.

At first there was no time to build an elaborate structure. All that could be attempted was a stronghold in which the Normans could defend themselves against a possible English revolt. So at first Geoffrey had dug round the foot of the hill a deep ditch which could be filled with water from the river, so as to form a moat. The earth and stones from the ditch were used to steepen the slopes of



A Norman castle

the hill and to make a high bank. On the top of this the workmen had to make a stout wooden stockade, from which the Norman garrison could command the surrounding country. All the time the Norman men-at-arms stood over the English workmen, making them toil harder and harder, and beating or wounding any who tried to dodge their share of the work, or who answered back their Norman masters.

When the danger of revolt was over and the country had settled down peacefully, Count Geoffrey set to work to replace his wooden walls by stone ones, to deepen and widen the moat, and to make strong stone buildings in place of the wooden ones. In the very middle of the castle, on the highest part of the castle hill, Geoffrey's son built a stone tower, the 'keep', for himself and his family, and the captains in his little army. This was the strongest and safest part of the castle. There was a well in the basement and cellars to store food, so that if the castle should be besieged, he and his garrison could hold out for a long time.

For nearly 200 years Geoffrey's descendants ruled as earls much of the county of Linford, in much the same way as Hugh's descendants ruled the manor of Billingham Tracy. In the time of weak kings, like Stephen, the earls ruled almost like little kings, paying very little attention to the orders of the king's government at Winchester (later, at Westminster). But strong kings, such as Henry II and Edward I, made all the earls and barons obey their laws and understand that there was one king of England.

For hundreds of years the earl used to be solemnly installed in his office by the king. He paid homage to the king for his earldom and swore loyalty to him, and the king himself invested him with the great sword of the county. But the earl gradually lost nearly all the power of governing the county that he had once had, and the word 'earl' became what it is today, merely a title of rank. Now it



An earl in coronation robes

entitles its holder to walk in procession after dukes and marquesses and before barons, to be called Right Honourable, to be addressed by the Queen as her 'cousin', and to wear a coronation mantle with three rows of ermine, and a coronet with eight silver balls and eight strawberry leaves.

The earls of Linford, and many of the other English earls and barons, weakened their position by constant quarrels with each other. So the English kings, especially the great King Henry II in the 12th century, began to appoint royal officers in the counties to collect the king's taxes and to keep an eye on the king's interests. Two of these still exist, the Queen's sheriff and the Queen's coroner. The king ordered that the royal sheriff, not the earl, should preside over the county court (which in Norman England took the place of the old shire moot). It was the sheriff, not the earl, who saw to the punishment of criminals, and who led the men of the shire when the king called them out to war.

So the real ruler of the county became the king, through his officer the sheriff. The office of 'sheriff' was an ancient one, descended from that of the Anglo-Saxon shire-reeve, who had been an official of the shire moot. In the 13th and 14th centuries the sheriff became an important person in the county; but to prevent his ever becoming as powerful as the earls had once been, he was allowed to hold his office for one year only—a new sheriff being chosen from among the principal landowners in the county by the

sovereign every year. To this day a new sheriff for every county is chosen each year by the Queen.

The sheriff of Linfordshire had to collect the king's taxes and take them to Westminster every year. If the taxes were short, the sheriff was held responsible. Many of the sheriffs did their work fairly, but sometimes they claimed more than they should have done and made money out of their year's office. The Robin Hood ballads, for example, tell us that the sheriff of Nottingham at one time was thought to be hard on the people. The sheriff also had to see that punishments were carried out on people who were found guilty of breaking the king's laws; in particular he had to attend any execution.

The duty of the king's coroner was to hold an inquiry for the king (as he still does today in some of these cases) if anyone was thought to have met death by violence, if anyone was accused of theft, or if any treasure rightfully belonging to the king turned up, such as a ship or royal fish (a whale or sturgeon) cast upon the shore, or hidden treasure discovered. The coroner had to keep records of any local crimes ready for the next visit of the king's judges.

In the middle of the 16th century another royal officer, the lord lieutenant, was appointed in place of the sheriff to take charge of the armed forces of the shire, and to lead them in case of war. In the county today the lord lieutenant is second only to the Queen herself and to the Queen's judges. Usually a great nobleman, with large estates in the county, is appointed to this post.

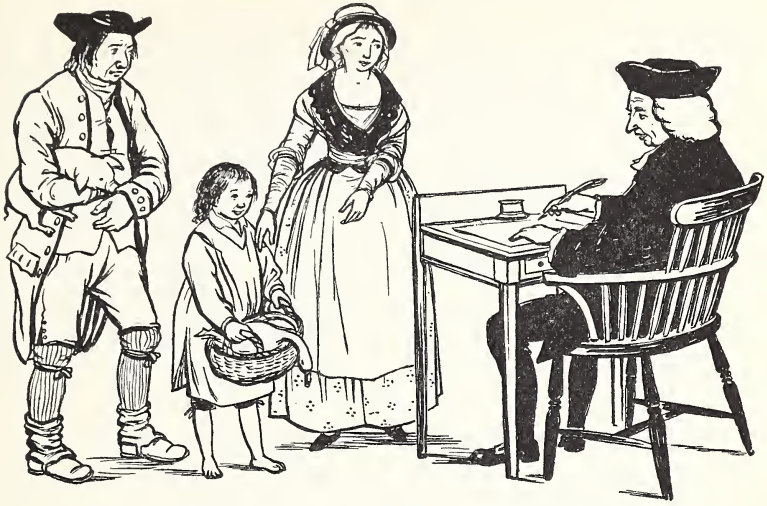
CHAPTER 9

BILLINGHAM RUNS ITS OWN AFFAIRS

After the Norman Conquest, when Hugh had settled down as lord of Billingham Tracy manor, one of the first things he did was to rebuild the church of St. Peter. The wooden church which the English had originally built about the year 800 had been burned down by the heathen Danes very soon after it had been built. But the grandsons of those very Danes had helped the English among whom they had settled to rebuild it on the same spot, this time partly in stone, not in wood alone. The Norman church of St. Peter's was built entirely ofstone and in much the same style as the churches the Normans had been used to in Normandy.

Hugh appointed a new priest; and after this the priests were appointed by the Tracies, lords of the manor, until they gave the church to the priory in the 13th century. A little stone house was built for the priest on the same spot where Edric had first built a wooden hut for Leofric. The priest needed only a little house, for in those days priests never married. The present large vicarage was not built until after the Reformation in the 16th century, when priests in the English Church began to marry and have families of their own. The priest was still paid in the same way as he had been, and he still received something like a tithe or tenth part of the wool and calves, lambs, piglets, and chickens raised in the parish each year. After the 13th century he no longer had, however, a tenth of the corn and hay and wood, for Robert Tracy had ordered that these should be given to the Priory of Our Lady in the Meadows near the town of Ladyborough to whom he had given the church.

The prior of Our Lady in the Meadows was, therefore, legally the rector of Billingham; but he appointed a substitute to do the work of the parish. The word 'vicar' means 'in place of', and that



Bringing the small tithe to the vicar in the 18th century

is why the priest of Billingham is called vicar—not rector. The tithes of Billingham were divided between the prior as rector and the parish priest as vicar, the rector taking the great tithe (the corn, hay, and wood) and the vicar the small tithe (the wool, pigs, chickens, and other things grown in the village).

In the 16th century, when Henry VIII closed the priory, he sold the great tithe of Billingham, together with much of the monastic property, to the Tracies. So now Col. Swinton, the successor of the Tracies and the present Squire of Billingham, is the lay rector, and the 'living' of St. Peter's is in his gift—that is to say, he appoints the vicar. The great tithe belongs to him and the small tithe to the vicar. Both tithes are now paid in money, not in goods.

The churches at Charlton and Aston were also given to the

priory in the 13th century, and so they also have vicars instead of rectors. But Sutton and Wandsley churches were never given to the priory, and so today they have rectors, to whom both the great and small tithes belong. That is one reason why in England some 'livings' are much better than others.

The priests of Billingham, as well as looking after the souls of their people, began to teach a few of the village boys to read and write. No one thought it necessary to teach girls in those days. The priest used to hold his little 'school' in the Tracy chantry chapel in St. Peter's Church, and many generations of Billingham boys had a little education in this way until, about 1548, this very early school disappeared. Schools of this sort were started in other parts of the country by other parish priests.

As the centuries passed, the Tracies became gradually less powerful in the village of Billingham, just as the earls of Linford became less powerful in the county. Already there had grown up a custom of electing each year in each parish an officer to take care of the parish church—the churchwarden. In the mid-16th century a waywarden was elected to look after the roads, and a little later an overseer of the poor was appointed. Law and order were supposed to be maintained in each village by a constable, chosen for the manor at the manorial court. As in many places manor and parish were much the same thing, the parish came also to take a great part in the choosing of the constable.

So, by about 400 years ago, each parish, like Billingham, was coming to be in matters of local concern almost a little independent republic, governed by these four main officers, the churchwarden, constable, waywarden, and overseer of the poor. There might be other local officers, the fieldmaster, who saw to the management of the open fields, the pinder, who rounded up stray cattle and shut them in the pound or pinfold, and in certain parishes officers with



A pinder driving cows into the pound

such titles as hayward or hedge-looker, dyke-reeve, dog-whipper, and even chimney-peeper. But the four first-named were usually the chief.

As the power of the Tracies declined and the manorial court grew less important, all these officers in one way or another were elected by the parishioners. They all had the right to call upon the parishioners to help in any work which had to be done, such as mending the roads or bridges. The parishioners supplied by their rates any money needed for enabling these officers to carry out their duties. These parish rates found the money to buy bread and wine for the communion, or to repair the parish lock-up, or to buy gravel or brushwood to fill up holes in the roads, or to provide for orphan children, or to pay a little cash allowance each week to any parishioner who was too old or too sick to earn his own living.

The general 'parliament' of the parish was the vestry meeting, which was at first held in the church vestry. This meeting elected

most of the parish officers and supervised their activities; it granted, if it thought fit, the money they asked for to be raised by rates. Every householder had the right to attend and to vote at the vestry meeting. In some places this meant that the meetings became rowdy and unmanageable, and gradually, in the 17th and 18th centuries, the wealthy members of a parish often set up a sort of committee, called a 'select vestry', which managed village affairs. These select vestries, however, often became corrupt, running village affairs in their own interests. Billingham and many other villages, however, continued to have an open vestry, in which all who wished could take part.

There are traces of this old system to be found in many parishes, as there are in Billingham. Churchwardens are still elected by the whole parish every Easter. There are sometimes the names or initials of former churchwardens on the bells or on the oak chest or elsewhere in the parish church. There may be in the parish the remains of the lock-up or the stocks, where the constable detained villagers who broke the law. Possibly there may be an old cottage, once the parish workhouse, where the overseer of the poor kept those poor villagers whom he could not maintain in their own houses. So here again it is often possible to find, even today, traces of the ways in which our ancestors managed their affairs hundreds of years ago.

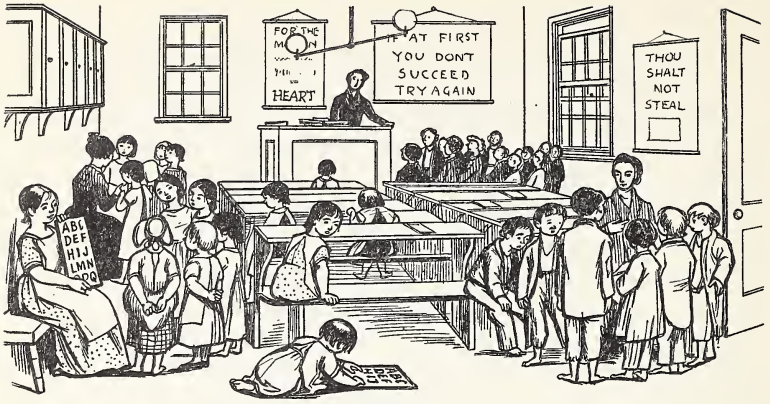
CHAPTER 10

BILLINGHAM SCHOOL IN LINFORDSHIRE

We read in the last chapter how the very early village school, begun by the priest of Billingham some 600 years ago, and held in the chantry chapel of St. Peter's Church, disappeared about 1548. Then the opportunity for the boys of the poor to get a little simple education came to an end. Some of the chantry schools were not done away with in the 16th century as Billingham school was. The chantry priest at Ladyborough, for example, taught Latin rather than English in his school, and so King Edward VI's government allowed his school to remain. For 400 years now it has been called King Edward VI Grammar School—not because Edward VI founded it, but because he refrained from destroying it.

We do not hear much about schooling again in Billingham until 1713, when Dorothea Swinton, wife of the then 'squire', read the letter which good Queen Anne sent out, saying that all boys and girls should be taught to read their Bible. So Dame Dorothea persuaded the squire to allow £10 a year to the parish clerk and £5 a year to his wife to teach both the boys and the girls to read, the boys to do a little easy arithmetic, and the girls to sew and to knit.

This school—still held in the chantry chapel of St. Peter's Church —lasted about 130 years. Then, about 1840, Billingham had a vicar who wished very much to provide more teaching for the children of his parish. So he gave a bit of his glebe on which to build a better school. He gave as much of his own money as he could towards the cost of the building, and he begged still more from his friends, from his bishop, from his college at Oxford, and from the then squire. Then he approached the National Society, which had been set up in London in 1811 to help to establish church schools all over England, and gained a further grant from



A church school in the 19th century

it. Soon there was a little two-roomed school building in between the churchyard and the gates of the vicarage garden. A schoolmaster was appointed, and he and his wife taught all who wished to come. The children for the most part paid a few pennies a week as school fees.

It was not until 1833 that any government money had been spent in helping schools, but then the government gave a grant to the National Society and another to the British and Foreign Schools Society which established Non-Anglican schools. The County Council had nothing to do with these schools, for this was fifty years before there were any county councils; but after 1839 the government began to send inspectors to make sure that the teaching in the schools was efficient.

Very many English parishes like Billingham owed their school to the Church. But there were many parishes where the parson had not been so keen as the vicar of Billingham or where it had

not been possible to raise enough money, and so there was no school. So in 1870 the first real Education Act was passed, and this arranged for committees to be set up all over England. These committees were called school boards, and they set up 'board schools' in places where there were no schools, and these were kept going from the rates. Board schools were set up at Aston—and also at Clayton; but Billingham was quite satisfied with its old 'voluntary school' and did not think it necessary to spend any more money.

In 1876 the government made it compulsory for all children to go to school until they were 10, and in 1891 nearly all schools were made free. In 1902, after county councils had been set up, the duties of the school boards were handed over to the county councils or borough councils. These were given power to build schools of their own—'council schools' and also to provide grammar schools. They also undertook to pay for equipping and maintaining the voluntary schools, such as the Billingham school, and they paid the salaries of all the teachers. The managers of the voluntary schools chose the teachers and kept up the school buildings.

So, after 1902, Billingham school was managed by a sort of partnership between the churchpeople who had built it and the representatives of the county, who by this time were finding nearly all the money necessary to keep it going. The Government Inspectors (H.M.I.s) kept a watch that both sides played their parts properly.

By 1918, when the government made school attendance compulsory for all children up to 14, Billingham school was no longer large enough for all the children. Wandsley was in even greater difficulties, because the mills which had been established there in the 19th century had brought many more people to the village, which had by now grown into a fair-sized town. Billingham, with the help of a grant from the National Society and a very generous

gift from General Swinton, raised enough money to build another classroom. But Wandsley decided that it could not raise enough money, and so it had to hand over its school to the county council, who had already built a council school at the other end of the town for the children of the mill workers.

In 1930 His Majesty's Inspectors paid a visit to Billingham school, and then wrote a report saying that the school was overcrowded and that the senior children from 11 to 14 were not getting a good enough education. They recommended that these children should go to the new senior school which had recently been opened at Ladyborough, where they could get an up-to-date education impossible to provide at Billingham. Many of the parents disliked this idea very much. They did not like their children to go 14 miles out of the village to school. They were worried about their mid-day meal, and they did not like sending the little children to school without the older ones to look after them. So they held a meeting to protest.

The Director of Education from Linford came himself to Billingham and talked to the parents. He explained all about the new school and told them what their children would gain by going to a school with fine classrooms, craft and science rooms, and playing-fields such as they could never have at Billingham. Then he arranged for a bus to take the parents to Ladyborough one day to see the school and meet the headmaster. Then the parents began to see that their children were going to get opportunities which had never come their way, which would have been beyond the wildest dreams of the people of Billingham when the little Church school was first built, about 1840, and even more beyond anything dreamed of by Dorothea Swinton in 1713, or by the Billingham priest in the chantry chapel in the years before 1548.

So Billingham school became a junior and infants school. In

1944, when the Education Act which governs schools today was passed, the government ordered that a great deal more money was to be spent in improving the schools all over the country. The managers of Billingham school and of all the other voluntary schools were told that they must raise half the cost of the improvements if they wished to keep their schools. The managers of Wulfingham school found they could not raise the money; so the County Council paid for the improvements, and Wulfingham school became a 'maintained' or 'controlled' school, in which two-thirds of the managers were appointed by the county. Billingham, however, managed to raise half the costs, and so its school became an 'aided' school, only one-third of the managers being appointed by the county. Billingham primary school now has four airy classrooms and a hall, and a good-sized playground, and a little garden.

Billingham school now fits into the school system of Linfordshire in a way which is very much to the benefit of Billingham boys and girls. The more bookish ones, who pass the special places examination when they are 11, go off to King Edward VI Grammar School at Ladyborough; while most of the boys and girls, who need just a good, sound, general education, go to the fine new secondary modern school at Ladyborough. Soon, it is planned, those who want to learn a skilled trade will be sent at 11 to the junior technical school or the junior school of commerce which are now being built at Wandsley; while anyone who is so clever with his fingers that he needs special training can pass on to the County School of Art at Linford. Every child, therefore, can now have the kind of education for which he is best fitted, whether or not his parents can afford to pay fees for it.

CHAPTER 11

THE GROWTH OF LINFORD COUNTY

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR's great-grandson Henry II did a great deal to bring all the counties of England under the same laws, and Henry's great-grandson Edward I, often called the Lawgiver, continued his work. We shall read more about this in Chapter 18. By the end of the 13th century the most important of the royal officers who brought law and order to the ordinary Englishmen were the king's judges, great and small. The system of royal courts which was by then established in England was not very different from that which exists today. From the royal courts in London were sent out highly trained assize judges, who went all through the country visiting twice a year each assize town (generally these were the county towns such as Linford) and sitting in the assize courts to administer the king's justice. It was, and still is, the sheriff's duty to attend the assize judge when he comes.

The assize judges are professional judges who come from London. We shall hear some more about them in Chapter 26, when we are discussing the English ways of administering justice. But in Linford itself, and all over England, there were established also local, amateur, part-time judges, called justices of the peace (J.P.s) or magistrates, who were appointed by the king and whose duty it was to keep the king's peace and to maintain law and order in their counties. Justices of the peace were first appointed in 1327 by Edward III, and some 15 or 20 years later it was first ordered that they must meet four times a year in quarter sessions and try all those accused of crimes.

In the office of J.P. or magistrate there is an interesting mixture of the Old English ideas and new ideas brought over by William the Conqueror from France. The Anglo-Saxons had thought that

local law and order was best looked after by local people (in the folk moot and shire moot). The Norman idea was that they should be dealt with by the king's officers (such as the sheriff and coroner). Now a magistrate is a local man chosen from the most trustworthy and reliable gentlemen of the district, but he is appointed by the Queen, and so he is the Queen's servant. This office of magistrate is a very characteristic English institution, and it marks the difference between the way we preserve law and order in England and the way used in most other countries.

As time went on, the magistrates, who had originally been appointed to keep the king's peace, came to be entrusted with all sorts of other duties. In 1349, for example, when a great many people in England had died of the Black Death and labour was very short, the magistrates were given the power to fix the rates of wages in each district in order to prevent their rising too fast. In the reign of Mary I in the 16th century, Parliament decided that in future each parish must look after the repair of its own roads. It was the magistrates' duty to see that the parishioners carried out this work and to punish the whole parish if the work was not properly done. The magistrates also had to see that bridges were repaired throughout the county, by making sure that anyone whose duty it was to repair an old bridge actually did so, and by making arrangements for the building of new bridges where necessary and for sharing out the cost over the county.

In the time of Elizabeth I an even more important duty was put upon the magistrates. Parliament ordered that each parish was to be responsible for the care of its own poor, and the magistrates had to see that, in fact, the parish carried out its duties.

Suppose some poor man in Billingham could not earn his living because he had had an accident, and needed food or clothing. Perhaps the Billingham overseer refused to give him help on the



16th-century almshouses

ground that the man had been born in Wandsley and therefore Wandsley must look after him. Wandsley, however, declared that he was no affair of theirs. It was then the duty of the Linfordshire magistrates in their quarter sessions to summon before them the claimant, to go into his history, and to decide which parish was responsible for him, and then to compel that parish to help him.

In times of hardship, perhaps after a bad harvest, there were sometimes so many people claiming help from parish funds that the Billingham people became anxious, and perhaps ordered their overseer to be very economical. This might make him refuse help to some poor claimant who really needed it. In this case the claimant could go to any magistrate who lived near the parish, and the magistrate could, if he thought fit, make an order on the overseer to allow the claimant a definite sum—perhaps three or four shillings a week.

Parish funds, as we know, came from rates levied on householders and landowners in the parish. The vestry usually decided on the rate, but before the parish officer could actually collect it, he had to take his rate book to the nearest magistrate and ask him to 'allow' it—that is, to say he might proceed with the collection. At the end of his year of service the officer had to have his account book checked by the other parishioners in vestry, and then he had to take it to the magistrate for him to sign the account. If the parishioners complained that the overseer had spent too much public money, and the magistrate was satisfied that this was really the case, he might order that the officer should pay it himself. So the magistrates were really the rulers of the county and the supervisors of the parish officers who ruled the villages.

The county magistrates also had to raise money in order to carry out their duties of government. This they did by levying a county rate on all lands and houses in the county, just as the parish rates were charged on all lands and houses in the parish.

Most of the government of the county is now in the hands of the County Council, about which we shall hear more in Chapter 13, though some matters of local government, the licensing of public-houses, for example, are still left in the hands of the magistrates. But the keeping of law and order in the county is still in the hands of the magistrates, and their duties are now very much what they were when Edward III originally instituted them in 1327.

CHAPTER 12

THE BEGINNING OF LADYBOROUGH

EVERYONE in Billingham and its neighbouring villages knows where Ladyborough is. The people from the western part of Linfordshire go to market there on Saturdays. It has a fine old Georgian market hall, an open cattle market, and a corn exchange. On market days the farmers, when they have sold their corn or their stock, go and dine together at the famous 'ordinaries' (public dinners) which have been held each Saturday for centuries, one in the lovely old half-timbered inn, the *Angel*, at the cross-roads as you go out of the town towards the ruins of the priory; and the other at its rival inn, the *Eagle*, just opposite the parish church of St. John.

Ladyborough has fine, big shops, two cinemas, a free library, and a King Edward VI Grammar School and a fine new secondary modern school. It also has a beautiful guildhall (town hall) built in the early 16th century.

Altogether Ladyborough is a much more important place than Billingham or any other town or village in the county except Linford itself. For example, instead of having a mere parish council, as the villages do, Ladyborough has its own mayor and corporation. As its name tells us, it is a borough. Its mayor sits in the borough court or in the council chamber in a finer chair than the ordinary magistrates or councillors. Each year, on a Sunday early in May when a new mayor is elected, the whole corporation goes to church in a very stately procession. First come two policemen, each carrying an old steel halberd. Then comes the mace-bearer, bearing a huge silver-gilt mace which was presented to the borough by one of its M.P.s centuries ago. Then comes the new mayor, wearing a lovely furred gown of scarlet and blue, a furred hat with a coloured feather in it, and a great gold chain



The mayor and corporation on their way to church

about his neck. Just behind him walks the town clerk in wig and gown. Then come the aldermen, wearing their scarlet gowns, and behind them walk the councillors in their blue gowns.

In church the mayor sits in a special carved pew with, fixed just in front of him, a pair of finely wrought iron brackets in which is placed the mace. Everyone remains standing until he is seated. Before the preacher begins his sermon he bows to the mayor, just as the judge's chaplain bows to the judge at the service held at Linford before the assize court opens.

Within the borough the mayor takes precedence of everyone (except, of course, the Queen herself or her representatives—her judges, her lord lieutenant, or her sheriff). The County Council has very little power in the borough, and its chairman, even though he may be a great landowner, takes a place after the mayor, who may be only a small shopkeeper or even a labourer. In one great 'borough', the City of London, even the Queen herself, driving through her own capital city, is always halted until the Lord Mayor invites her in.

All this ceremony once had an important meaning, and to understand even a little about it, one must trace back the history of the borough and find out how the ceremony started. Let us look at the story of Ladyborough.

At the time, some 1,500 years ago, when the Billings were first settling at Billingham and the Wulfings at Wulfingham, Ladyborough was not there at all. Where the town stands now there was nothing but a few acres of waste land on the borders of the river, with Charlton and Wandsley on one side, and Barton and Sutton on the south bank on the other.

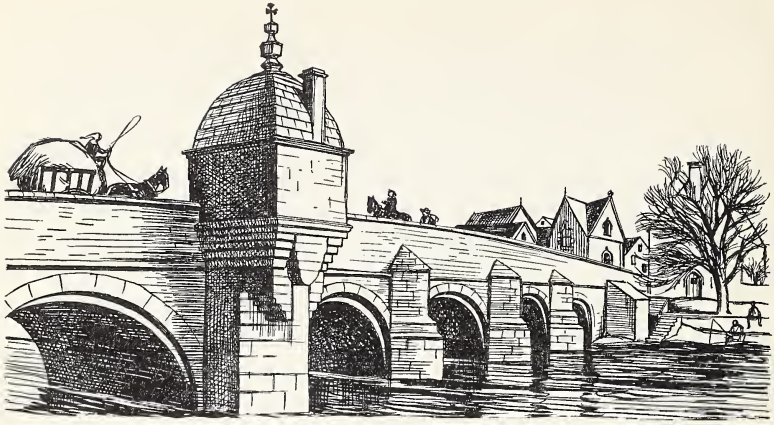
What made the town grow up was perhaps in the first place the decay of the Roman bridge which carried the old Roman road from Londinium (London) to Eburacum (York) across the River

Lin near the old Roman settlement, Linchester. (Linchester had fallen into ruins long before the English sailed up the river.) Until a new bridge could be built (and it was hundreds of years before this happened), the river had to be crossed by a ford. Where Ladyborough now stands, the river was narrower than at Linchester and had a firm gravel river-bed which made a good crossing. So, soon after the Norman conquest, the new road which was made to replace the old one crossed the river just where Ladyborough bridge is today.

Sometimes travellers moving northwards or southwards had to wait a day or two for the waters of the Lin to go down before they could risk the crossing. So one or two houses sprang up on both sides of the river to provide food and lodging for such travellers. Gradually the various old lanes leading to the ford began to grow into well-travelled roads.

Then in the 13th century one of the Tracy family, as penance for his sins, founded a monastery on a piece of land to the west of the river, just where three roads met, to the north-west of the ford. He gave it to the monks of Cluny, the Cluniacs, and dedicated it to God and Our Lady. The priory church was hallowed on 25 March, the anniversary of the day when the angel appeared to the Virgin Mary. (That is the reason why one old inn in Ladyborough is called the *Angel*, and also why Ladyborough Spring Fair is always held in the last week in March.) This was the beginning of Ladyborough Priory, the House of Our Lady in the Meadows.

The little settlement by the ford grew rapidly. Huts were built there for the masons and carpenters who spent years in helping the monks to finish the great priory buildings. When the buildings were finished the many visitors who came to visit the priory church, and to worship before the relics of saints treasured there, could not all be lodged in the priory itself; so more inns sprang up.



A medieval bridge with a chapel

Soon the prior and his monks decided to replace the old ford by a fine stone bridge. This brought more workmen. To help to pay for the bridge, the prior obtained permission to take toll from wayfarers using it; and so he built a toll hut at each side of it. On the centre pier he put up a little stone chapel, where travellers could stop and pray. Here early each morning a chaplain said Mass, which travellers, whichever way they were going, could attend before they proceeded on their journey. Then the prior obtained from the king the right to hold an annual fair in the week following 25 March each year. His officers would control the fair, and all the merchants who sold goods there would pay him toll. This brought the priory a great deal of money.

In this way the settlement grew into a little town with the prior as its lord. In course of time, as the town grew richer, the townsfolk began to think they ought to have some share in governing

themselves. So when they knew that the prior was hard-pressed for money because he had to rebuild much of the priory, some of the leading townsmen offered him a very considerable sum of money for a charter. This was a document by which the prior gave up some of his rights over the town, and agreed that in part at any rate the townspeople might manage their own affairs. With a charter the little town became a borough. That is why to this day it is called Ladyborough.

Ladyborough gained further charters, some from later priors, some from kings, and each new charter gave the townsfolk (the burgesses) a little more independence. One king, for example, gave them the right to hold a weekly market and to collect tolls from all who sold goods there. Another gave them power to hold another annual fair, in the week after 27 December (St. John's Day).

At first the townsfolk had used the priory church. But by the 14th century, when the town had grown rich, they decided to build one of their own. So they built a fine new church, larger than the priory church, on one side of the market-place, and they filled its windows with beautiful stained glass which was made and fixed by Flemish workmen. When the church was finished, the bishop dedicated it to St. John the Evangelist. (That is why the second fair at Ladyborough begins on St. John's Day, and why the second old inn in Ladyborough (that near the parish church) is called the *Eagle*—from the symbol of St. John).

Of the many charters bought by the burgesses of Ladyborough that which they valued most was the one which gave them the right to collect their own taxes and pay them to the king, through his sheriff, instead of having the sheriff's officers collect them. This charter also gave them the right to choose a corporation of their own to govern their borough, and directed the members of the

corporation to elect annually a bailiff (later known as mayor) to rule the borough for the next twelve months. The mayor and corporation, therefore, came to do in the borough all the work of governing, and much of that of judging, which elsewhere in the county was done by the county magistrates in petty sessions and quarter sessions.

So while, of course, Ladyborough, like all other places in the county, was subject to the king's courts at Westminster, most petty offences in it were tried in the borough court, with the mayor and aldermen acting as the magistrates. Anyone not satisfied with the decision of the Ladyborough magistrates always had the right to appeal to the county magistrates sitting in quarter sessions at Linford; but in fact the county magistrates very seldom interfered with the borough courts.

Nearly all boroughs have mayors and corporations, but not all boroughs in England were thought to be large or important enough to set up borough courts. On the other hand, some boroughs grew so large and important that they were allowed to establish their own separate courts of quarter sessions, each presided over by a Recorder, an experienced and trained lawyer. The only borough of this kind in Linfordshire is the county town and cathedral city of Linford, a town so important that it has been made into a county borough, with power to manage all its own affairs independently of the County Council.

CHAPTER 13

COUNTY, BOROUGH, AND PARISH TODAY

By the beginning of the 19th century local government in Linfordshire—and throughout England and Wales—rested in the hands of the justices of the peace, who ruled the county, the borough corporations, who ruled the towns, and the vestry meetings, which governed the villages. The people of Linfordshire, and elsewhere, were beginning to resent being ruled and taxed by the J.P.s, in choosing whom they had no share. The borough corporations in many boroughs were becoming unpopular because they were inefficient and corrupt, managing the town's affairs in their own interests rather than in the interests of the town as a whole. The parish vestry meetings were also proving extravagant and inefficient, particularly over their most important work, the relief of the poor and distressed. Indeed, the social problems raised by the Industrial Revolution were so great that they could not be dealt with by parish officers such as the overseers and by small local bodies such as village vestries. During the 19th century, therefore, various changes and improvements were introduced.

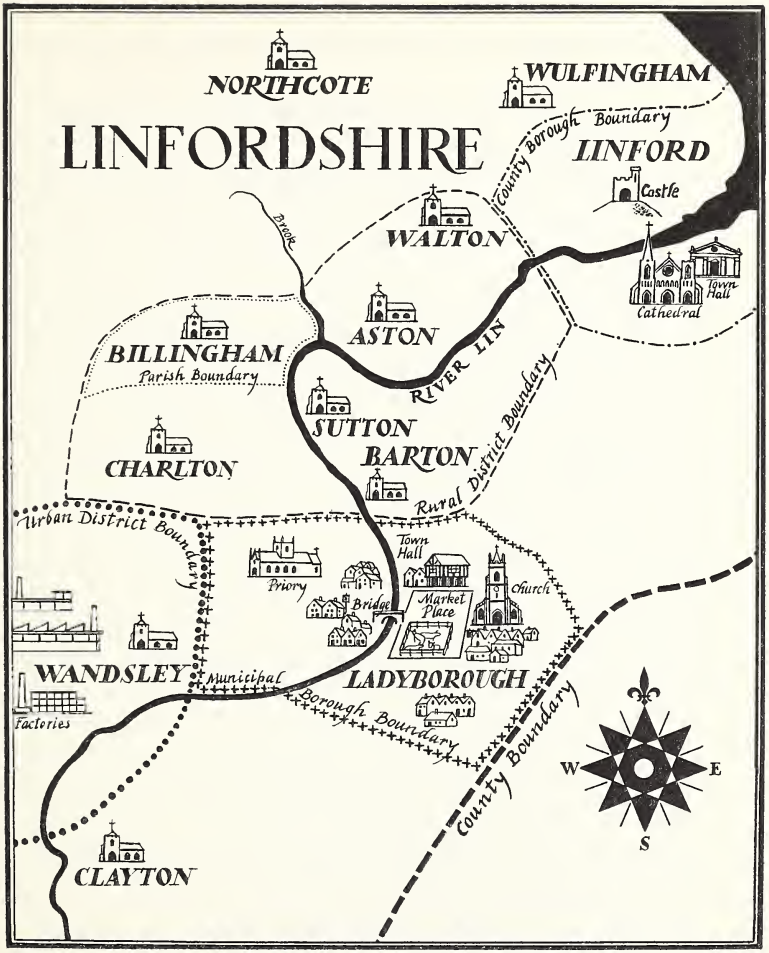
In 1834 Boards of Guardians were set up to take over the care of the poor from the vestries. In the 20th century their duties were taken over by the Public Assistance Committees of the county and county borough councils. In 1835 the borough corporations, such as those of Linford and Ladyborough, were reformed, and new town councils were established, the councillors being elected by all the ratepayers in the town. These councillors elected a number of aldermen to join them, and the whole council elected the mayor, who acted as chairman of the council. The duties of the councils were laid down by Parliament, and further duties were allotted to them by Act of Parliament from time to time.

The 1888 Local Government Act made the last major reform when it set up councils in the counties very much like those in the boroughs, except that they had a chairman instead of a mayor. These took over nearly all the duties of the J.P.s, except that of trying cases in the magistrates' court. These new county councils were elected by all the ratepayers in the county (apart from those in the county boroughs). The only important change that has been made since then is that now the county and borough councils are elected by all persons over 21 who live within the boundaries. The county is marked out into divisions, and the borough into wards, and the people in each division or ward elect representatives to the council.

In Linfordshire, therefore, there are today the following local authorities:

1. *Linfordshire County Council.* This has its headquarters in the county town, Linford, and exercises its authority over the whole county, except Linford itself and for most matters also Ladyborough and Wandsley. It works through various committees, such as the Education Committee, the Highways Committee, the Health Committee, and others. It appoints a number of officials who are specialists in their particular branches, and who advise the committees and carry out their instructions.

The senior official is the Clerk to the Council, who is usually a lawyer. He acts as secretary to the Council, and he or his deputy attends all committee meetings. Other officials are the Treasurer, who looks after the Council's money and supervises the collecting of the rates; the Medical Officer of Health, who is always a qualified doctor; the Director of Education; the Chief Constable, who is responsible for the police force; the County Engineer; and others. The Council also employs many other people, some highly-paid specialists, and many clerks and labourers. All the teachers in



Boundaries in Linfordshire

schools owned by the County Council, the workers in public libraries and museums, the doctors, nurses, welfare workers, sanitary and food inspectors who work under the Medical Officer of Health, the roadmen and dustmen and parks' gardeners, and many others are all council employees. They receive fairly standardized salaries and, like civil servants, are entitled to pensions at the end of their working days. Like civil servants also, though they may hold private political views, they may not allow these to be known in their work.

All letters written on county business are headed 'Linfordshire County Council', and all over Linfordshire the letters L.C.C. may be seen on the shafts of workmen's shovels and picks and on the sides of their wheel-barrows and on the county council lorries and vans. The Billingham village policeman has a little iron plate over his door saying Linfordshire County Police, and the exercise books in the schools have Linfordshire County Education Committee printed on their covers.

There are 52 counties in England and Wales, but 61 county councils, because some of the very large counties, such as Yorkshire, are divided into two or three parts, each with a separate council.

2. *Linford County Borough Council.* Linford is the county town of Linfordshire, but Linford, like Ladyborough, has a royal charter giving it the right to govern itself. Linford, as we know, is a much older town than Ladyborough: it dates back to one of the first settlements of English invaders in the 5th or 6th century, who made their encampment at a place on the River Lin where it was possible to ford the river. It is the cathedral city, and it is much larger than any other town in the county. So in 1888 Linford became a county borough. This means that its corporation kept all the powers of a borough and gained those of a county as well. For example, Linford is now the only town in Linfordshire which manages its own

schools through its own Director of Education. Also, as we learnt in Chapter 12, Linford has its own court of quarter sessions, presided over by a Recorder.

Linford County Borough Council works in much the same way with much the same powers as Linfordshire County Council. Its senior official is called Town Clerk instead of Clerk to the Council.

There are eighteen boroughs of very long-standing importance in England, which by royal order are treated not as county boroughs but as full counties, and these still have sheriffs of their own. Nottingham, York, and Lincoln are examples. In 1888 a special 'County of London' was formed, and this consists of the City of London and twenty-eight metropolitan boroughs, such as the boroughs of Kensington and of Southwark. We speak, therefore, of the London County Council.

3. *Ladyborough Municipal Borough Council.* Ladyborough, as we know, has a charter giving it the right to have a mayor and corporation and granting it certain rights of self-government. Ladyborough manages through its Municipal or Town Council most of its own day-to-day affairs—its street-lighting and cleaning, its parks, playing-fields, swimming-baths, and libraries, its drainage, and food and health inspections. Ladyborough also runs its municipal golf course, and the gas and electricity works were owned by the Council and run for the benefit of the town until the nationalization of electricity and gas in 1947.

4. *Wandsley Urban District Council.* Wandsley, which in the 18th century was little more than a village, grew enormously in size during the 19th century because of the mills which were set up there. By 1888, therefore, Wandsley was nearly as large as Ladyborough, but it had no royal charter. So in 1894 Wandsley and other such towns were allowed to elect councils called urban district councils, to manage their affairs. These now have powers much like those

of borough councils, especially the power of building and looking after council houses. The letters W.U.D.C. to be seen on tools and carts and motor vehicles in Wandsley show that these belong to the Wandsley Urban District Council. In the country districts many of the duties carried out by urban district and borough councils are performed by rural district councils, elected by groups of villages.

All these authorities have the right to make by-laws to deal with their own locality only.

5. *Billingham Parish Council.* The parish council governs the smallest unit of local government, the parish, and was instituted in 1894 to take the place of the old vestry. It is elected by a parish meeting which must be called at least once a year. Every person over 21 years of age may attend. The parish council is responsible for lighting the village street, looking after village greens, playing-fields, and footpaths, and providing such village amenities as land for allotments. The village, through its parish council, can express its opinion to its Rural District or County Council, and even to Parliament.



A Scottish provost

The place in which you live, unless you live in Scotland, must fall into one of these groups. It must be a parish and part of a rural district, or an urban district, or a municipal borough, or a county borough. The school which you attend may be managed by the County Borough Council or by the County Council.

The various local government bodies which we find in Linfordshire are typical

of those to be found in all counties in England and Wales. Scottish local government, however, has developed independently of the English system, and this is a very brief summary of how it works. The main councils are the county councils, the burgh councils, and the district councils. The county councils, of whom the chairman is called the convener of the council, work much like English county councils. All the burghs in the county, however, send representatives. There are three types of burghs (boroughs): Royal Burghs, which have charters from the Crown; Parliamentary Burghs, which were instituted in 1833 by Act of Parliament; and Police Burghs, which have been made since then. The distinction between the three is now largely lost, and the larger burghs, whatever may be their origin, have more powers than the smaller ones. Some of the Royal Burghs, such as New Galloway and Dornoch, are little more than villages. The four great cities of Scotland, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Dundee, are called 'counties of cities' and are independent of the county councils, as are the county boroughs in England. The chairman (or mayor) of a burgh council is called the Provost, or sometimes the Lord Provost.

The district council in Scotland manages the affairs of a group of villages, somewhat like a rural district council. The council is elected every three years, and the county councillors of the district are members automatically.

CHAPTER 14

LAW AND ORDER IN LINFORDSHIRE

We have read in Chapter 11 how the magistrates were, and to some extent still are, responsible for seeing that law and order were kept and that criminals were brought to justice. Now, magistrates carry out their duties with the help of the police force; but only 150 years ago there was no police force. Who then saw that people did not break the law and protected ordinary citizens from robbers and murderers and saw that everyone had fair play?

In very early times, before big towns had grown up, and when such villages as Billingham were very small, it was the duty of every villager to act as a policeman. If one villager found someone trying to steal his corn or his poultry, he would raise hue and cry, and everyone had to leave his work and chase the criminal until he was caught. But as the villages grew bigger, this plan did not work very well, and so perhaps the folk moots decided that one person in each village should be especially charged, perhaps for a year, with the duty of keeping order in the village. In Norman times this person was called the 'constable', and he was chosen at the manorial court. Almost every man in the village had to take his turn at being constable. It was hard work and there was no pay, and naturally no one wanted to leave the work on his own farm to do this unpopular job.

In later years people who could afford it took to paying other people to serve their turn as constable, and so gradually it came about that one man would go on doing the job for several years on end. But as the job was unpopular, it often happened that only the poorest and sometimes the stupidest people were constables, and they were often anxious not to offend their neighbours by enforcing the law too severely.

In the towns there were, as well as constables, night watchmen who, armed with lanterns and staves, were supposed to guard the gates of the town and patrol the streets. No doubt the unlit towns of the 15th and 16th centuries would have been more dangerous than they were without these bands of watchmen; but if Shakespeare's picture in *Much Ado About Nothing* of the constable Dogberry and his feeble and inefficient Watch is at all typical of the 16th-century practices, the Watch were often as likely to apprehend the innocent as the guilty.

In the country and on the roads leading into London, rich people travelling along the highways were always in danger of being attacked by highway robbers. There was one stretch of road, for example, between Linford and Ladyborough, which ran for 2 or 3 miles across a high common. This was a favourite haunt of highway robbers who would attack the rich merchants travelling from the coast to Ladyborough. The records of Ladyborough Priory tell how in the 15th century the prior was attacked on his way home, and when he and his followers refused to hand over their wealth, the robbers pulled them from their horses and hanged from the nearest trees those who could not escape. On another occasion it is recorded that a band of robbers attacked the tollgate at the bridge over the River Lin near the priory. They beat the tollgate keeper and carried off all his money. Travellers hardly dared go along lonely roads except in parties, and well-armed.

The highwaymen of the 17th and 18th centuries were sometimes made into local heroes, who were supposed to have robbed the rich and defended the poor; and stories and ballads were written of their exploits. But most of them were rough, violent men who were a menace to ordinary peaceful citizens and continued their lawless way of life because there was no proper organized force to bring them to justice. If they were captured and brought to trial, they



An early 19th-century watchman

were generally hanged—indeed, people were hanged in those days for much smaller faults.

Crime and violence became so bad by the mid-18th century, especially in London, that when Henry Fielding, the novelist, became magistrate at Bow Street court in London in 1749, he organized a small band of full-time, paid constables, who became known as the Bow Street Runners. These were the first professional policemen. Other magistrates also began organizing small bands of paid constables, and in 1782 a small armed police force began to patrol London and the surrounding districts after dark, especially to suppress the highwaymen. Gradually other towns and country districts began to raise funds to establish similar bands of professional constables and watchmen to protect their property.

In the early 19th century the sheriff and magistrates of Linford agreed that something must be done to put down crime and safeguard property. So they and other wealthy people in the neighbourhood joined together and not only provided money for paid constables and offered rewards for the apprehending of criminals, but also themselves helped to patrol the district. All this did much to put down crime and establish order. In Ladyborough, however, when a suggestion was made that the same should be done, the Mayor and Corporation were afraid that to set up a police force would interfere with people's private liberty. They preferred to leave things as they were.

In 1829 Sir Robert Peel, the Home Secretary, managed to persuade Parliament to set up a permanent police force of 2,000 men to cover almost all London. At first people were suspicious of the Metropolitan Police, but as they proved to be efficient without interfering with anyone's legitimate liberties, they became popular. They were called 'bobbies' or 'peelers' after their founder, Sir Robert Peel.

During the 19th century Parliament came to require, first, the town councils and, later, the magistrates of each county to set up police forces. It would be about 1850 that the first full-time policeman came to Billingham and took over responsibility for Billingham, Charlton, and Aston. This village policeman had a hard life. He had as low pay as any farm labourer, and he had to work long hours, often on Sundays as well as weekdays. He had hardly any holidays, and he had to be ready to go on duty at any time, day or night, if there was trouble in his district. He did not carry arms, but had a heavy truncheon to defend himself with. If he captured an offender, he would put him in the village lock-up until he could bring him to the magistrate's court. The Billingham lock-up was a decent little stone building, kept clean, and ventilated by a barred window high up in the wall; and the policeman never kept a prisoner there more than a night or two. But in some places, where the policeman was not properly supervised and was lazy and inefficient, the lock-up was insanitary and without any form of heating, and unfortunate victims were sometimes kept there for days or even weeks. In 1856, however, the government



A 'peeler' of 1829

began to send round inspectors to report on these bad conditions, and by the end of the century almost all the local police forces were reasonably well run.

Responsibility for the police force at the present time varies. The Metropolitan Police of London are under the Home Secretary; the county police are under a joint committee of the magistrates and the County Council; and the county borough police are under the Watch Committee of the County Borough Council. At the head of every local police force is a Chief Constable. The police have to pass tests of physical fitness and intelligence, and they are thoroughly trained in their work. Their pay and conditions of work are controlled by the Government, they can express their views through their federation, and they receive pensions at the end of their service. They are universally acclaimed as the most efficient police service in the world.

CHAPTER 15

LINFORDSHIRE AND PARLIAMENT

Although in England every county, borough, and even parish manages a great many of its own affairs in the way that seems best to it, all of them have to obey the laws of the Queen's government. Everyone, whoever he is, has to pay at least some money in taxes, as well as in rates, and this money is used for the good of the whole country. But just as every person over 21 now has a share in choosing the members of the various local councils, so does every person over 21 now have a share in electing the members of Parliament. Just as a borough is divided into wards, and each ward elects members of the council, so the whole country is divided into constituencies, each of which elects a representative to be its member of Parliament.

This state of affairs came about only very gradually, and we shall read more about it in Chapter 23. Now we are concerned with how Linfordshire has come to be represented in Parliament.

Count Geoffrey, the first Norman Earl of Linford, had the right, as had the other great lords, to advise the king about governing the country. So had the Bishop of Linford and other bishops, and also some of the abbots and priors. These people in medieval times formed the King's Council. Sometimes the king also sent for two knights to come from each shire to meet him with his other advisers; sometimes also two burgesses—townsfolk—were sent for from each borough. In 1265 Earl Simon de Montfort, brother-in-law to the weak and foolish King Henry III, called together people of all these classes—all the bishops, some of the abbots, two knights from each shire, and two burgesses from each borough. The meeting of these representatives is generally taken as the beginning of Parliament in its modern form. They had to help de Montfort

to decide how to govern the country and how to raise money, since Henry III himself was clearly quite unfit to do either.

Ladyborough at this time was just beginning to be known as a prosperous little town, and it was very important for its later history that Earl Simon included it as one of the two boroughs in Linfordshire from which he invited burgesses to meet him at Westminster. The two burgesses were Ladyborough's first two members of Parliament. They were chosen by the people of the town—not by a secret ballot as now, but openly by a show of hands after a good deal of heated discussion among the leading citizens.

For a long time the townsfolk of Ladyborough did not realize what an important privilege had been granted to them. In fact, they thought of it rather as a burden than as a privilege—for while the two members were away in Parliament at Westminster or Shrewsbury, or Bury St. Edmunds, or Lincoln, or wherever the King's Council was sitting, the other townsfolk had to pay them wages—two shillings a day—and the money for this had to be gathered by rate from the townsfolk.

It was partly this matter of payment of members which made the Ladyborough burgesses at times choose not the best men, but those who were willing to pay for themselves. Then in Tudor times the Ladyborough voters would sometimes choose someone who was not really a Ladyborough burgess at all—often someone recommended to them by the Earl of Linford or by some other nobleman or gentleman who had estates and influence in the county. Clearly this was not a good thing, either for the country in general or for Ladyborough in particular, for such people were not really representatives at all.

It also happened in Ladyborough, as in many other towns, that the members of Parliament came to be chosen, not by the burgesses in general, but by only a few of them—the mayor, the aldermen,

and the other members of the corporation. In those days the members of the corporation in many boroughs served for life, in effect electing one another instead of being elected by the townsfolk generally, as the members of the Town Council are now. So this meant that the townsfolk as a whole had, in fact, no say in who represented them in Parliament. Often, when either a Tudor or a Stuart king gave a new charter to a borough, he took care that the mayor named in it—the 'charter mayor'—was a friend of his. Then, when once in control of the borough, he could make sure that plenty of his friends were made members of the corporation. If a borough managed this way once got the wrong people governing it, it was very difficult for it ever to get things right again.

Sometimes the mayor, aldermen, and councillors were more interested in making money than anything else, and were ready to elect anyone to Parliament if he would pay them for doing so. Boroughs like this were called 'rotten boroughs'. By the 18th century Linford had become a rotten borough. Only about 200 people—burgesses, councillors, aldermen, and mayor—took any part in electing the member; and anyone who would pay them £10 apiece might be their M.P.—unless, of course, someone else offered more.

Often a borough became a rotten borough because, though it had once had a large population, its population had moved away—perhaps because its trade had been gained by some other town. But though it now had very few people, it still retained the right to send members to Parliament. Indeed, in one or two cases a borough with the right to elect members of Parliament had by the 19th century virtually ceased to exist at all. The constituency of Old Sarum near Salisbury consisted of no more than an uninhabited mound, and that of Dunwich, once on the coast of Suffolk, had disappeared under the sea. The right to nominate

members for these constituencies where there were hardly any or no electors had usually fallen into the hands of the big landowner of the neighbourhood. Sometimes, in fact, very good men got into Parliament this way: for example in the 18th century William Pitt, the great Prime Minister, represented Old Sarum in Parliament because the nomination was in the hands of his family. But obviously the system was not at all democratic, and it was often much abused.

In some boroughs the mayor and corporation were entirely under the influence of some nobleman or gentleman—perhaps their landlord. At election time they would choose as M.P. anyone he told them to vote for. Boroughs like this were called 'pocket boroughs', for they were said to be in the pocket of the powerful family. Ladyborough was for a long time a pocket borough of the Swintons of Billingham. Its votes belonged only to the mayor, twelve aldermen, and twelve councillors; and since the Swintons owned most of the houses in which these lived and the shops in which they carried on their trade, it was difficult for them to act contrary to the wishes of the Swintons. In theory they 'elected' their M.P.; in practice the Swintons chose him.

Sometimes the 'patron' of a borough would even put up the seats for sale, and some wealthy person who wanted to be an M.P. would pay him his price to be 'elected' to Parliament. A man who could 'sell' a borough was called a 'borough-monger'—like a fishmonger or an ironmonger.

Early in the 19th century many people began to urge that reforms should be carried out to ensure that M.P.s really 'represented' the people of the country. In 1832 the Great Reform Act was passed, and again further acts were passed in 1867 and 1884. By the end of the 19th century all M.P.s represented more nearly equal numbers of voters, and in 1918 every man over 21 was given



Voting at an election in the 18th century

the right to vote for his M.P. It was not till 1928, however, that women were allowed to vote on the same terms as men.

Linfordshire now sends altogether four representatives to the House of Commons, and the Earl of Linford, who sits in the House of Lords, also concerns himself with the interests of his county. The county borough of Linford still has its own member—no longer appointed by the mayor and corporation, but freely elected by all citizens over 21. Ladyborough, however, has lost its separate members, and nowadays it forms part of the Cherry Tree Parliamentary Division of Linfordshire covering all the western part of the county. The member is still one of the Swintons, Colonel Geoffrey Swinton; but he is member only because he was freely elected by the majority of the people in his division. The rest of Linford County is divided into two parliamentary divisions: Wandsley and district, a new division made in 1884 because Wandsley had grown so large that it had to be separated from the Cherry Tree Division; and East Linfordshire.

Every person in Linfordshire over 21 years of age, therefore, can take a part in the government firstly of his own locality and secondly of the country as a whole. Every elector has the right to make representations, if he wishes, either to his representative on the local council—parish, district, borough, or county—or to the member of Parliament for his parliamentary constituency.

In the next part of this book we shall see how this central government of England has grown up, and what work our member of Parliament does in Westminster.

SECTION II

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER 16

THE FEUDAL SYSTEM

When the father of a family goes out to work he brings home the money which he earns by the work he does. He shares this money with his wife. Between them they pay for their house; for the coal, electricity, and gas which light and warm the home and cook the food; for the food and clothes they and their family need; besides the many other things that money can buy to make life in the world today so pleasant and so exciting. Thus with the help of money, which can be exchanged for all the things that a family requires, a man needs only to do his own very special job—it may be helping to make or repair motor cars, or selling things in a shop, or delivering goods in a lorry—in order to house, feed, and clothe his family. He does not have to build his own house, nor hunt the animals and grow the food he eats, nor weave the cloth for his and his family's clothes. The money he earns by his specialized work enables him to pay other people to do all the specialized work of providing for his family. This arrangement is called 'the division of labour', and its efficiency allows us to enjoy the leisure and pleasures of our life today.

A man may also have to travel some distance to work, especially if he lives in one of the great cities, like London, or Birmingham, or Glasgow. There are some jobs which consist almost entirely of travelling, such as that of a guard or engine driver on British Railways, or a heavy lorry driver, or a commercial traveller. Travel, also, plays a part in most people's holidays. All this travelling is quite easy today, and without it, as without money and the division

of labour, the leisure and pleasures of our life would not be possible.

But many hundred years ago life in England (Scotland and Wales were then foreign countries) was not at all like this. Most people hardly used money at all, and travelling was very difficult indeed. This is the England described in the early chapters of this book: the England which William of Normandy came across the Channel to conquer. England then was a land of villages, each surrounded by its open fields and meadows in clearings in immense forests; of river valleys filled with bogs and pools of water; an England with hardly any roads or even tracks. There was very little specialization of labour then. The Billings, when they first settled in Billingham, had to build their own houses; catch, breed, or grow their own food; gather their own fuel; spin their own thread and weave the coarse cloth from which their clothes were made. They could not pay anyone else to do any of these things for them. Indeed, the ordinary man never used and never needed money during his whole life. Hardly anyone in Billingham ever travelled farther than half a day's walk from his village. Life for the ordinary man, woman, and child was a hard and continuous struggle to earn a bare living from the land. There was very little leisure, and pleasures were simple and rare—though for that very reason they were perhaps more deeply enjoyed than our more easily come-by pleasures are today.

William the Conqueror had to have an army to protect his new kingdom from the native English, who often rebelled against his harsh rule, and from foreign kings who were jealous of his success. He had also to secure obedience to his commands in every part of his kingdom. In our own day, with our specialization of labour based on money, it is as easy for the Queen to pay some men to form the regular army and others to act as policemen to see that

the laws are obeyed, as it is to get any other job done for wages. However specialized the job, the man who does it will be able to use his wages to buy all the things he needs but does not—indeed could not—make himself.

But in William the Conqueror's England the king had not enough money to pay for all the help he needed to defend and govern the country. And in any case money would have been of little use to his soldiers and governors. For the men who grew food had no use for money, and therefore would not sell for money the food they grew. So what was William to do?

To get the help he needed he used a method which was already in use in France, in his own Duchy of Normandy, and in a simpler form was already working also in the England he had conquered. We now call this method 'the feudal system', though William and his soldiers did not think of it as a system at all. William gave land to the most important of the soldiers who had helped him conquer England—about two hundred of them in all. That is how, we remember, Count Geoffrey came to have lands in Linfordshire. These 'barons' in return for their land had to supply the king at their own expense with about 4,000 mounted and armoured knights, who formed the backbone of his army.

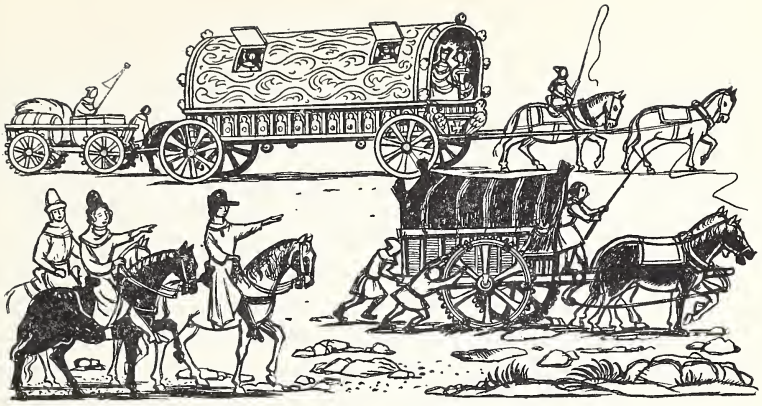
The great estate William gave to each baron was made up of many smaller pieces of land, widely scattered about England. William was glad to arrange it like this, in order to prevent any baron becoming too strong. But as it happened all the land of England did not belong to the king to do what he liked with. At different times as he put down the rebellions of great English landlords, such as Hereward the Wake of Lincolnshire, more land came into his power. And as land became his, so he gave it away to his followers from time to time. With the land went the ordinary English men, women, and children who lived on the land and

farmed it. They continued to work their land as before, but instead of paying money rent as they would today, they had to work so many days a week on the land which each baron or knight kept for himself. They also had to pay their overlord some of their produce—chickens, eggs, and even sometimes a calf or foal.

William did not tell the barons how they were to get the knights whom they owed him in return for the land he had given them. But usually the barons solved their problem in the same way as the king had solved his. They kept in their own hands as much of their land as they needed to support themselves and their families in a manner suited to their high rank—next after that of the king himself. The rest they passed on to other men, as Geoffrey passed the manor of Billingham to Hugh de Tracy, in return for the services of one or more knights, according to the amount of land each man held.

So when the king called out his army, each of his tenants-in-chief—as the barons who had received their land directly from the king himself were called—came to the place named by the king at the head of the number of knights whom he owed. To prevent the tenants-in-chief using their miniature armies to fight each other or even against him William made every man who held more than the smallest amount of land swear an oath of loyalty to him on Salisbury Plain in 1086.

The tenants-in-chief owed the king certain other services in return for their land in addition to military service. The most important of these services was to attend the King's Council, to give him advice, and to see that the decisions of the Council were carried out on their estates. This is how the king secured obedience to his commands in every part of his kingdom. We will hear more about the King's Council in the next chapter.



The King travelling in the 14th century

CHAPTER 17

THE KING'S HOUSEHOLD AND COUNCIL

The king, like his tenants-in-chief, owned estates scattered all over England. In those days it was so difficult to bring food for the king and his court from his scattered estates to any central place, such as Westminster, that the king and his court used to travel from estate to estate, eating at each place the food which had been gathered there since their last visit. William the Conqueror liked to celebrate the great feasts of Easter, Whitsuntide, and Christmas each year surrounded by his court and his tenants-in-chief. Easter he celebrated at Winchester, Whitsun at Westminster, and Christmas at Gloucester. The king was thus constantly on the move round his kingdom.

Wherever the king was, he was the head and centre of the government of England. The men who were always with him naturally helped him with his task of governing, and gradually

they each came to have a specialized part to play in the government of the country. The men who were always with the king were the heads of the main parts of his household. The Chancellor was in charge of his chapel, the Treasurer of his valuables, the Marshal of the housing and order and comfort of the court, and the Constable of its safety (and of the army in war-time).

In those days even the greatest household had only two main rooms, a living-room and a bedroom. The living-room was a great hall, with an open timbered roof and a platform at one end for the great man and his family. You may still see halls of a similar kind in the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, in the Inns of Court in London, and in a few very old country houses which have survived, such as Penshurst in Kent.



The Lord Chancellor

In a corner of the hall behind a screen was the royal chapel, with its altar and holy vessels for celebrating the services of the Christian religion. This screen was called in Latin *cancella*. From the word *cancella* the head priest of the royal chapel got his title *Cancellarius*, which is translated into English as 'Chancellor'. This is the origin of the important member of our present-day government whom we call the Lord Chancellor.

In those days the only men who could read and write at all readily were the clergy or priests. So what was more natural than that all the letters which the king needed to send should be written by the priests of his chapel, directed by the Chancellor? Pro-

tected by their screen from the bustle and confusion of the great hall, the main public room of the court, the clerks of the royal chapel wrote the king's letters and sealed them with his Great Seal. Soon their department became known as the Chancery, and its head, the Chancellor, became the head of the king's government.

The Chancery developed a regular routine for its business from which it would not depart. The clerks made copies on great rolls of parchment of all the letters (called 'writs') which they sent out. Thousands of these rolls of parchment have survived to the present day. They are kept in the Public Record Office in London, in charge of an official who is still called the Master of the Rolls. They provide historians with most valuable information for writing the history of our country.

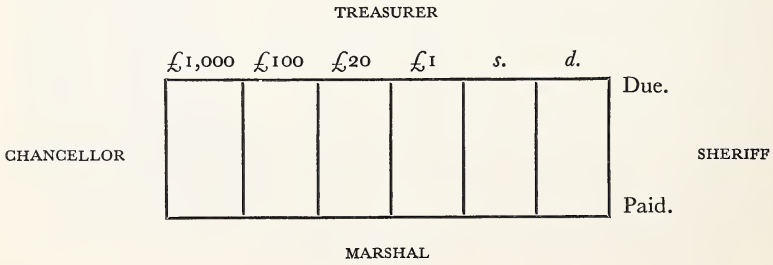
The great hall was too public a place for keeping anything of value in safety. The king's bedroom, known as his 'chamber', was much more private and secure. So there he kept his valuables, including all the money collected in taxes. For although the common people never used money in their daily lives, and even the king and his tenants-in-chief based their lives directly on the land and its produce, there was some money in circulation. Money was necessary to buy luxuries, such as the fine cloths imported from Europe and the silks and spices of the East. The king had to have money for the management of the country, especially for hiring foot soldiers and archers for his army. So in addition to all the payments he received in service and food he also made wealthy people pay him taxes in money.

The head of the royal chamber was the Treasurer. Under him was a staff of chamberlains. Some of these managed the treasure and kept the accounts. Others looked after the personal comfort of the king.

Twice a year, at Easter and Michaelmas, all the great officers of

the royal household met in the Exchequer to receive the taxes which it was the duty of the sheriffs to collect. The Exchequer was named after the special table on which the accounts were worked out. Roman figures were used in England until about the time of Shakespeare, and sums are far harder to do in Roman figures than they are in our Arabic ones. In fact, they cannot be done at all in Roman figures without the help of a calculating machine called an 'abacus'. The chequered table from which the Exchequer took its name was a big abacus. Its top was divided into six parallel columns, running right across it. One column was for thousands of pounds, another for hundreds of pounds, another for twenties of pounds, another for single pounds, another for shillings, and the last column was for pence. The Treasurer and his chamberlains sat at one side of the table, consulting and making up their accounts, and putting counters into their side of the columns to show how much money the sheriff owed the king. The sheriff and his men sat at one end of the table, handing the money they had collected to the Marshal and his sergeants, who sat opposite the Treasurer and put the money into their side of the columns. At the head of the table, opposite the sheriff, sat the Chancellor and his clerks keeping a second record of the accounts.

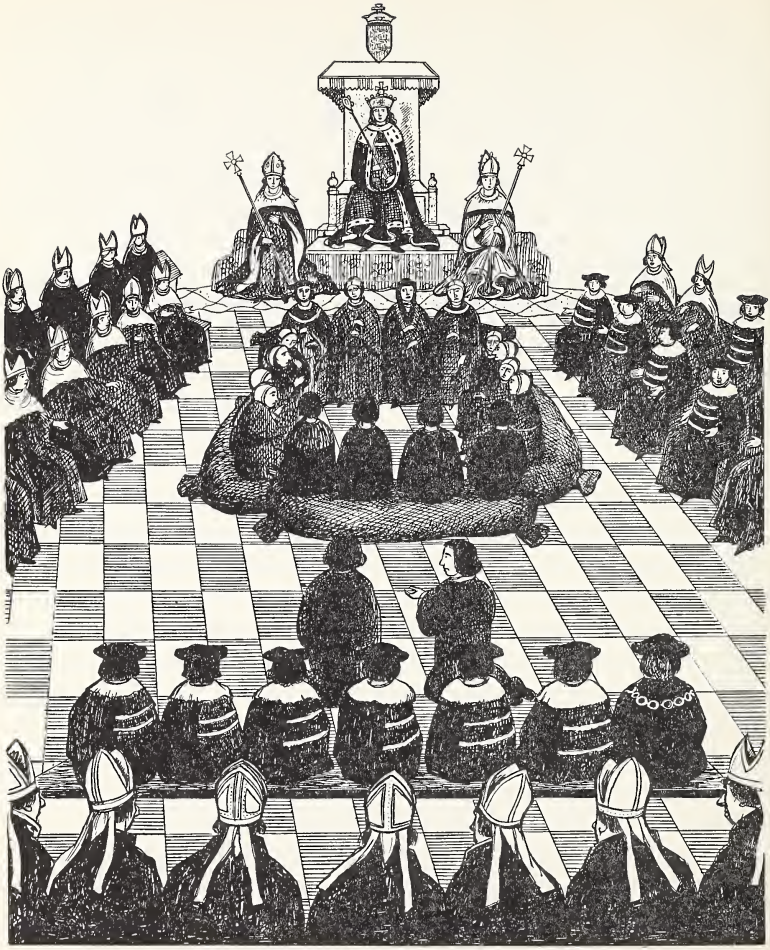
Here is a plan of the Exchequer in action.



When the money at the Marshal's side of the table balanced the counters at the Treasurer's side, the account was closed. The government then had two copies of the account, the Treasurer's and the Chancellor's. These were kept, like the Chancery records, on two great rolls of parchment. The Treasurer's copy was called the Great Roll of the Pipe. We have an unbroken series of these Pipe Rolls from 1155 until 1831, when this old method of keeping the accounts was at last given up.

The sheriff, who probably could not read or write, was given a 'tally' as his record of the account and as his receipt for the money he had paid into the Exchequer. A tally was a stick of wood about one inch square and about nine inches long. Into one edge were cut notches, corresponding to the columns on the Exchequer table, and therefore showing how much money the sheriff had paid in. The stick was then split into two lengthways, so that each half was notched. Any alteration in the notches after the tally had been split would show up immediately the two halves were brought together again. The sheriff kept one half, the Exchequer kept the other. This method of recording payments went on until 1826. In 1834 orders were given to destroy the huge store of old tallies at Westminster by burning them in the furnaces which heated the Houses of Parliament. So much of this dry old wood was heaped on to the fires at once that the furnaces overheated, and the old Houses of Parliament were burned down. The Parliament building in Westminster today was built in the middle of the 19th century to replace the buildings which were burned down in 1834.

We know all these details about the working of the Exchequer so many centuries ago because about 1179 the Treasurer, Richard, Bishop of London, described it all in a book called in Latin *Dialogus de Scaccario*. This means in English 'A Talk about the Exchequer'.



Parliament in the time of Edward I

THE KING'S HOUSEHOLD AND COUNCIL

As England became more settled and peaceful after the great disturbance of the Norman Conquest, the authority and the business of the government grew greater. It was found very inconvenient to have the main departments of the government, like the Chancery and Exchequer, moving around the country with the king. The constant moves interrupted their work, the number of officials and their records became increasingly difficult to transport and house, and people who had business with the Chancery and Exchequer found it expensive and inconvenient to chase around the country after them. So after about 1209 the Exchequer remained permanently in Westminster Hall (a building which adjoined the old Houses of Parliament but escaped destruction in the fire of 1834 and still stands today). About thirty years later the Chancery also found a permanent home, in London. The place where the Chancery clerks worked for centuries from this time is now occupied by the Public Record Office, and the road running past it is still called Chancery Lane.

In this way as the departments of the government became busier they developed set ways of doing their work and broke away from the royal household in which they had begun. An even more private part of the household than the king's bedroom or chamber developed into a new office through which the king issued his orders to the departments which were no longer constantly with him. This was the wardrobe, a small inner room opening off the king's bedroom, where he kept his most valuable personal possessions—his jewels, his robes, and his money. In the reigns of King John and especially of his son Henry III the wardrobe developed into a staff of clerks with a Privy Seal. Through them the king controlled the Chancery with its Great Seal, the Exchequer, the judges, and the sheriffs.

The great officers of the household, who had become the great

officers of the government—the Chancellor, Treasurer, Marshal, and others—continued to accompany the king when their departments had settled down in London. They were always with the king, available to give him their advice from day to day about the details of government, and to see that his decisions were carried out. But several times each year this small group of councillors was joined by all the tenants-in-chief, to form the King's Great Council. All really important questions, such as peace or war and taxation, were reserved for discussion with the Great Council. The French word for a discussion—'Parliament'—came gradually to be applied to meetings of the Great Council during the 13th century. We have already learned in Chapter 15 how the custom grew up of calling two knights from each shire and two burgesses from each borough to bring information and advice to the Great Council. Gradually these 'Commons' became essential to Parliament, and they began to meet apart from the lords and upper clergy of the Great Council. Thus our House of Lords and House of Commons began. In the next chapter we shall read more about how all this came to happen.

CHAPTER 18

THE KING AND THE LAW

On 15 June 1215 one of the most striking and important events in English history took place in a meadow called Runnymede beside the River Thames. King John yielded to the demand of the bishops and the barons that he should attach his Great Seal to a document in which he made a long and most solemn promise to rule justly and well and to allow the people their rights. Enough copies of this Great Charter (in Latin *Magna Carta*) were made, each sealed with the King's Great Seal, for every sheriff to have a copy to read out in his shire court. Four of these precious documents have survived the centuries to the present day—the very documents sealed at Runnymede, sent to the sheriffs, and read out in the shire or county courts all over England.

The barons who forced John to grant the Great Charter had a long list of detailed complaints about the harsh and unlawful way in which the king had treated them and governed the country. The Charter is almost entirely made up of remedies for these detailed complaints about John's ways of getting money to which he had no right—complaints which were very important to the people whom John was misruling, but in later years ceased to have any real meaning. Yet the Great Charter is rightly said to be the foundation stone of English liberty and self-government, and is a household word in every part of the world to which the English ideal of law and government has been carried.

There are two reasons why the Great Charter has had for future generations an influence never dreamed of by the indignant barons who presented it and the furious king whom they forced to accept it. The first reason is that the barons' detailed complaints against the king raised the most important question which can ever be

raised between a government and its subjects, the question whether the king must obey the law or whether he is above the law and can break it when he chooses. Peoples all over the world have to face and answer this question at some time in their history. This does not appear in the words of the Great Charter, but it is what all the barons' complaints and all the king's promises add up to. The Great Charter proved that the people could force the king to obey the law.

John, like all rulers who want their own way, claimed that as he made the law, nothing he did could be unlawful; the very fact that he, the law-maker, did it made it lawful. The barons claimed that the law of England had been created in the past by all the kings and their councils, and that each king must obey the law he inherited from his forefathers unless he deliberately altered it with the advice of his Great Council.

The barons reminded King John that every king of England from the earliest times had had to swear, before they were crowned (as they still have to swear), to rule according to the laws and customs of the kingdom. The Great Charter was no more than a most solemn and detailed repetition of John's coronation oath, in writing and with his Great Seal to confirm it. For this reason every king down to Edward IV re-issued the Great Charter and confirmed it when he was crowned.

The second reason why the Great Charter has played so large a part in the development of British institutions is the use that the supporters of Parliament made of it in the great struggle between Parliament and King Charles I in the 17th century—a struggle which we shall read about in Chapter 20. The most famous of the clauses of the Charter is clause 39: 'No freeman shall be arrested or imprisoned or dispossessed of his property or outlawed or banished or in any way destroyed except by the legal judgement of his peers or by the law of the land.' In 1215 there were hardly

any 'freemen' except lords of manors, who were important people such as the Earl of Linfordshire and the Tracy family of Billingham. Three-quarters of the inhabitants of England then were villeins or serfs, the people who actually tilled the soil. No one in the 13th century ever thought about freedom or rights for the mass of the people who worked on the land and belonged to the land—almost like horses and cattle.

But when in the 17th century Parliament tried to make King Charles I obey the law, there were no longer any villeins or serfs—all Englishmen had become freemen. So Parliament claimed that the Great Charter protected all Englishmen from imprisonment at the king's pleasure and gave them all the right to trial by jury. Because Parliament won its struggle against the king, these precious freedoms were won by Englishmen centuries before they were won by most of the peoples of the world. The French did not win them until after the French Revolution in 1789. The Great Charter, therefore, played an important part in the growth of English freedom, because its clauses took on a meaning undreamed of by the men who wrote them in the 13th century.

John's son, Henry III, was not an energetic, self-willed, and cruel ruler as his father had been; he was rather bookish, unpractical, and saintly. He quarrelled with his barons because his rule was inefficient and because he gave all the most sought-after positions in England to his foreign favourites. Also he allowed the Pope of Rome to take much of the wealth that belonged to the English Church. The barons called upon Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, to protect them from Henry's misrule. Simon de Montfort actually took over the government of the country from the king, and in 1265 he called his famous Parliament to which for the first time came not only knights from the shires but also burgesses from the important towns.

We learned in the last chapter how John and Henry III began to call two knights from each shire court to join their Great Council in Parliament. These knights were able to tell the king and his Council what was happening in each shire, and then could go back and tell their neighbours what the king was going to do to help them and what help (usually money) he needed from them. As trade and manufactures increased, the towns grew wealthy. So it was natural to add two burgesses (citizens) from each important town to Parliament. Simon de Montfort called representatives from the towns to Parliament because he needed as much support as he could get against King Henry; but, in fact, he only invited burgesses from towns which he knew would support him.

Henry III's son, Edward I, who succeeded him in 1272, was one of the wisest and most powerful kings in English history. He began regularly to call to Parliament two burgesses from every flourishing town, and through Parliament he passed a series of very important laws which put an end to the many evils and disorders which had grown up during the troubled reigns of John and Henry III. These laws, which earned Edward I the title 'the Lawgiver', provided a firm foundation on which English institutions and English law continued to grow for the rest of the Middle Ages. Parliament continued to develop and to increase in importance, and began for the first time really to share the government of England with the king—to be something more than just an advisory council.

CHAPTER 19

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN KING AND NOBLES—A STRONG MONARCHY

THE feudal system was the only way the king could raise an army and secure obedience to his commands in every part of his kingdom at a time when there was very little money in use. But it was not nearly so efficient a method of getting these things done as paying men money to fight and to govern. Under the Roman Empire money had been used for these purposes; but after the collapse of the Roman Empire buying and selling for money as the normal way of getting goods and services became impossible in the stormy war-like centuries that followed. But during the middle ages the feudal system gradually began to break down and to give place again very slowly to a system based on money.

It happened that the Normans conquered England at a time when the use of money in daily life was beginning to increase very rapidly. Between 1096 and 1204 armies of Christians from western Europe went on crusades to recover the Holy Places in Palestine from the Mohammedan Turks. These crusades greatly increased long-distance travel and trade, and therefore the use of money. By the middle of the 12th century, as the idea of using money became more common, it had become quite usual for men who owed knight-service for their land to pay cash (at the rate of twenty shillings yearly for each knight's service) instead of serving in person. Sometimes they paid money to a substitute to serve for them. These payments were called 'scutage', meaning 'shield money'.

The king preferred to receive money instead of personal service, because in time of peace he could save the money and so have more to spend when he had to go to war. Also mercenary soldiers (soldiers who fight for wages) would go anywhere and do anything

so long as the king paid their wages, whereas the great nobles were always disputing with the king about the details of their military service. The most famous of these disputes occurred in 1297 between Edward I and his great nobles at a Parliament held on Salisbury Plain. Bigod, Earl of Norfolk and Earl Marshal, refused to go to Gascony, in France. 'By God, Sir Earl,' swore the King, with a pun on the Earl's name, 'thou shalt either go or hang!' 'By God, Sir King, I will neither go nor hang!' replied the Earl. Neither did he.

But this breakdown of the feudal system with the increasing use of money, though it had advantages, had also grave disadvantages. It led, among other things, to the growth of a class of professional soldiers. In war-time they were paid by the king and fought in his army; but in peace-time they were unemployed, poor, and hungry. So they would fight for anyone who offered them money, against anybody their employer wished to fight—even against the king himself. Thus any trouble-maker with plenty of money could raise an army and start a civil war.

The reign of each weak king in English history—Stephen, Henry III, Edward II, Richard II, Henry VI—was disturbed by troubles of this sort. The writer of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (which often contains eye-witnesses' reports) in Stephen's reign described how dreadful life became for the common people and for all men trying to earn their living by the arts of peace:

> 'When the traitors understood that Stephen was a mild man and soft and good, and no justice executed, then did they all wonder. They had done him homage and sworn oaths, but they were all forgetful of their troth. For every rich man built himself a castle, which they held against the king. And when the castles were made, they filled them with devils and evil

men. Then took they those whom they suspected to have any goods, labouring men and women, and threw them into prison for their gold and silver, and inflicted on them unutterable tortures; for never were any martyrs so tortured as they were. Then was corn dear, and flesh and cheese and butter, for there were none in the land. Never yet was there more wretchedness in the land, nor ever did heathen men worse than they did. For they spared neither church nor churchyard but took all the goods that were therein, and then burned the church and all together. If two men, or three, came riding into a town, all the township fled from them, concluding them to be robbers. To till the ground was to plough the sea. The earth bare no corn, for the land was all laid waste by such deeds. And men said openly that Christ slept, and his saints.'

The long wars between England and France known as the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) brought these troubles to a head. By the end of the wars life in England was almost as completely based on the use of money as it is today—the 'division of labour' described in Chapter 16 had developed. The great nobles had become accustomed to a restless and adventurous life leading the English armies in France. They found it hard to settle down to the hum-drum occupations of peace. Thousands of men who had no skill except in the use of arms were thrown out of work, and were ready to join in any fight which would enable them to enjoy again the excitement and the rewards of their skill.

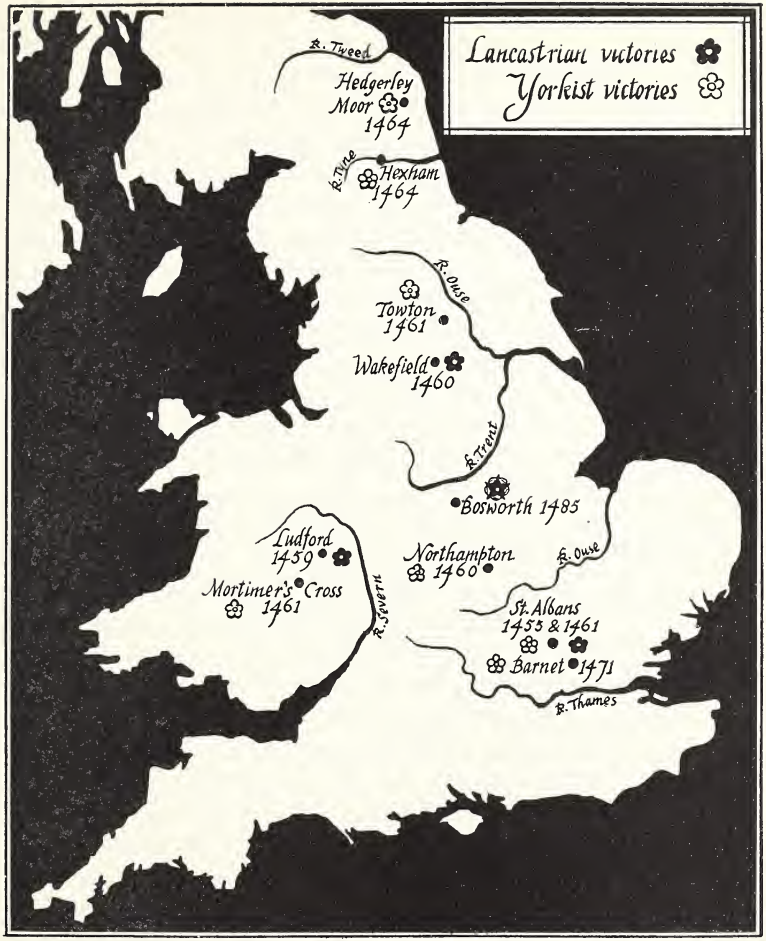
Unfortunately Henry VI, the king who reigned at that time, though a 'royal saint', a patron of learning, and a builder of churches, was quite incapable of keeping in order the turbulent barons—his 'overmighty subjects'. So in 1455 there broke out a series of murderous civil wars—known as the Wars of the Roses—in

which the great nobles fought each other for the crown of England. For a generation the king's peace, the authority of the king's judges, and all respect for the law collapsed. Might was right.

The Wars of the Roses had two results of outstanding importance: most of the old feudal lords were either killed on the battlefields or executed by their enemies; and all people who wished to earn and enjoy their living by the arts of peace were so disgusted by the behaviour of these warlike lords that they were ready to welcome any really strong king who would restore peace and the authority of the law.

The man who rescued the English people from the bullying ways of the overbearing lords and founded the most gloriously successful royal house in British history was Henry Tudor—Elizabeth I's grandfather, Henry VII. In 1485, at the Battle of Bosworth, he made himself master of England, and by his wisdom and skill he kept himself on the throne in spite of a series of plots and rebellions such as had unseated so many kings during the Wars of the Roses. Now that most of the old feudal nobility had gone, Henry was able to re-establish the king's peace, the authority of the king's judges, and respect for the law throughout his kingdom. He made the king unchallengeably stronger and richer than his strongest and richest subject—a position no king had enjoyed for over a century. He left a rich, secure, and dignified crown to his son, Henry VIII, who was also a strong, wise ruler.

The rule of the Tudor monarchs was a despotism of a most unusual kind. Despotism means absolute rule by one man—a dictator, who usually has an overwhelming force behind him. But the Tudors had very little force at their disposal for use against their own people. If they wanted to go to war against a foreign enemy they could call out every able-bodied man in the shire levies. The new officials, known as lord lieutenants, whom Henry



The principal battles of the Wars of the Roses



A Yeoman of the Guard today

VIII and his successors placed at the head of each shire or county, were responsible for the shire levies. But if the people generally were opposed to something the king wanted to do, the king could not force them to obey by using the shire levies, for the shire levies would not fight against their own people—perhaps their own families. The only force the Tudor kings could use against their own subjects was their personal bodyguard of a hundred Yeomen of the Guard, whose successors, still wearing the uniforms and bearing the weapons designed in Tudor times, may be seen today in the Tower of London and guarding the Queen on great public occasions, such as her coronation and when she opens a session of Parliament.

Because they had no standing professional army to compel obedience to their orders, the Tudors could not follow any policy which was unpopular with the people as a whole. They could compel individuals, however important, and even small groups to obey them; but against the people generally they were powerless. Lack of money, also, often prevented them from doing what they wanted. Although they had some regular income from their extensive lands and from customs duties, this did not give them enough money to fight a war. Also, because prices were rising throughout the 16th century, their regular income became insufficient even in time of peace. If they wanted more money, they had to ask Parliament for it. Since King John had promised in the Great Charter not to impose new taxes without the consent of the

people who would have to pay them, the law had grown up that the king could not tax the people without the consent of Parliament. By the time of the Tudor kings, this had become firmly established. So the Tudors, strong as they were, could not really make any important change in policy unless they could persuade Parliament to support them.

The Tudors not only had no professional army, but they also had no professional civil service to carry out their orders, as the government has today. They had the great departments of state which had developed from the Royal Household as described in Chapter 17—the Chancery, the Exchequer, and a few similar offices. The Royal Council had a Secretary with a staff of clerks, and this Secretary, or the President of the Council, was gradually becoming more important than the Chancellor. When Cardinal Wolsey, Henry VIII's Chancellor, died in 1530, his successor as head of the government, Thomas Cromwell, was not the next Chancellor, nor a churchman, but the King's Secretary. Until far into the 17th century the Secretary, or the President of the Council, was always the head of the government.

But except for these officers in Westminster the Tudors had no professional civil servants at all. They had to rely on the Justices of the Peace in the shires and on the mayors and councillors in the boroughs, about whom we have already read so much, to give them the information they needed to govern the country and to see that the decisions of the government were carried out through the country. The king was able to consult these all-important people and to inform them of the reasons for his decisions through Parliament. For the knights of the shires and the burgesses who formed the House of Commons could speak for the Justices of the Peace of their shire or the councillors of their particular borough. They came up to Westminster, where they advised the king, and heard

his decisions and his reasons for deciding as he had done. Then they went back to the shires and boroughs and saw that the decisions which they had helped to make were carried out in practice. It is difficult to think of any better way of governing the country before the development of our modern civil service in the 19th century.

The need to carry all their important business through Parliament was in reality a source of strength and not of weakness to the Tudors, because they and their people were bound together by common interests and purposes. The main common purposes of both king and people were to restore order at the end of the Wars of the Roses, and to make the king strong enough to prevent any possibility of the renewal of the civil wars. In Henry VIII's reign both king and people wished to free religion in England from the authority of the Pope. And in Queen Elizabeth's reign, both she and her people were united in their fight to save England from the might of Spain and the attempt to restore the Pope's authority by force (*see* Chapter 34).

By the time the last Tudor monarch, Queen Elizabeth I, died in 1603, Parliament had become accustomed to sharing the government of England with the Queen. In the next chapter we shall read how the Stuart Kings and their Parliaments fought over exactly how the government should be shared between king and Parliament—about which of them, king or Parliament, was really the supreme ruler.

CHAPTER 20

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN KING AND PARLIAMENT—THE VICTORY OF PARLIAMENT

Even in the later years of the great Queen Elizabeth I there had been quarrels between the Queen and Parliament, because the House of Commons sometimes insisted on discussing matters which the Queen regarded as her own business. For example, certain members of Parliament thought that the Church of England was still far too much like the Church of Rome; but the Queen held that religion was a matter for herself as supreme earthly governor of the English Church and for the bishops, but not for Parliament, to discuss. Parliament also often made the Queen very angry by persisting in discussing her marriage and the question of who was to succeed her on the throne. In 1593 a particularly stormy meeting of Parliament took place. As a result Peter Wentworth, a leading champion of freedom of speech in the House of Commons, was imprisoned in the Tower of London and kept there until he died three years later.

If Queen Elizabeth, who was gracious and very clever in dealing with people, found sharing the government with Parliament increasingly difficult, it is not surprising that a crisis arose when she was followed on the throne by an awkward, middle-aged foreigner. Elizabeth I never married, and when she died in 1603 her heir was her Stuart cousin, James VI of Scotland. He had been king of Scotland for 36 years when at the age of 37, he also became James I of England. Even on his journey from Edinburgh to Westminster to be crowned trouble arose. Crowds naturally gathered in every town and village on his road to see and greet their new king. In the little stone-built market town of Stamford in Lincolnshire a pick-pocket was caught red-handed in the crowd. He was brought

before James, who ordered him straight to the gallows. This was quite within James' rights as king in Scotland. But no Englishman could be hanged until he had been found guilty by a jury and condemned by a judge. This was how another of the clauses of King John's Great Charter was understood. This incident, though quite unimportant in itself, showed that it might be difficult for James to learn how to change his ways. 'I am now an old king, and must not be taught my office', he proudly told Parliament on one occasion.

James meant to end the quarrels between the people who wished the English Church to return to the Church of Rome and those who wanted the English Church to be even less like the Church of Rome, but in fact he only made the quarrels worse. When he heard that the Puritans (the people who wanted a Church less like the Church of Rome) wanted to do away with the bishops, he pounded the table with his fist and exclaimed: 'No bishop, no king', meaning that if they started by abolishing the bishops they would certainly go on to abolish the king. This made the Puritans very angry. Then by first raising and then dashing the hopes of the Roman Catholics, James finally provoked Guy Fawkes into trying to blow up the King, his council, and the members of both Houses of Parliament at a state opening of Parliament in the House of Lords. It is the failure of this attempt in 1605 which we still celebrate every 5 November with bonfires, fireworks, and effigies of Guy Fawkes.

James was always quarrelling with his Parliaments, chiefly about money, his very unpopular favourites to whom he entrusted the government, and foreign policy. James believed that kings were appointed by God, and that no one had the right to oppose them. When, in 1621, the House of Commons reminded him that their privileges were 'the ancient and undoubted birthright and

inheritance of the subjects of England', James with his own hands tore out the page of the Commons' Journal which reported these words. He declared that these privileges depended on the favour and permission of the king, and that he could deny them if he wished.

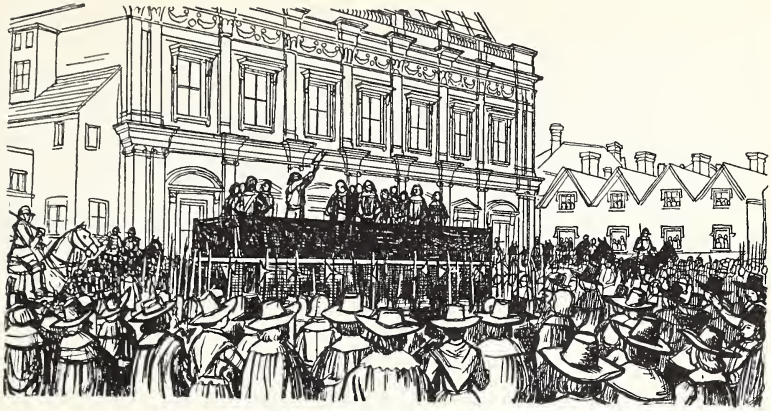
James and Parliament, though they continually quarrelled, never completely came to grief. But when Charles I succeeded his father in 1625, Parliament for the first time took the offensive in the struggle for supremacy between king and Parliament. Instead of voting the new king the customs duties for life, as was usual, they voted them for one year only. The king needed this money to pay his unavoidable expenses, and so he was put in the position of having to ask Parliament every year to renew the grant. This gave Parliament the chance each time to demand some concession by the king. Charles quarrelled continually with Parliament, usually about religion. Charles wanted to make the Church of England more like the Church of Rome; but the number of Puritans in the House of Commons increased at each General Election, so Parliament wanted to make the English Church less and less like the Church of Rome.

In 1629 Charles tried the experiment of ruling without Parliament. Provided he could get enough money to carry on the government there was no reason why he should call Parliament. Since the king had the power to dismiss any judges who displeased him, he could make them decide all lawsuits in his favour if it was in any way possible to do so. In this way he was able for 11 years to collect enough money to manage on. He might have managed for longer had he not rashly involved himself in a war with his Scottish subjects by trying to force them to use the English Book of Common Prayer. By no means could he raise enough money for war, so in 1640 he had to call Parliament again. Then he had to face their

furious resentment both at not having been called for 11 years and about many of the things he had done during those 11 years.

The king and Parliament might have reached some sort of agreement were it not for the bitter quarrel over religion—Charles was sincerely religious, but his views were narrow and his methods high-handed; whereas the Puritan party in Parliament were growing more and more vehement. Their attempt to abolish the bishops split Parliament and country into two parties, one supporting the king and the Church of England, the other the Puritan party and a Church without bishops. At this moment a rebellion broke out in Ireland; but Parliament dared not give Charles an army to restore order in Ireland, because they knew that he would use it also to make himself master of Parliament. In the past the king had always controlled the army, but now for the first time Parliament opposed the king's right to lead the army. Whoever controlled the army was in the last resort supreme, and therefore neither king nor Parliament could afford to yield control of the army to the other unless forced to do so. Only civil war could be the result.

One of the main results of the war between king and Parliament was the creation of a larger and more efficient army than England had ever known before. Oliver Cromwell, a Huntingdonshire squire with deep religious principles, emerged as the leader of this Parliamentary army; and by 1645 he had defeated Charles. Indeed, by the end of the civil war the army was stronger than either the king or Parliament. Cromwell and the army, having seen that Charles would never agree to rule with Parliament, took the law into their own hands 'to call Charles Stuart, that man of blood, to an account for the blood he has shed'. They brought him to trial, and condemned him to death. On 30 January 1649 the King was beheaded on a scaffold erected outside the Banqueting Hall of his own palace of Whitehall—a building which still



The execution of Charles I

stands in London today. Parliament had established its right to force the king, even to the point of execution, to obey the law.

But, though Parliament had won the struggle with the king for supremacy, it was Oliver Cromwell and the army, not Parliament, who ruled England. Just like James I and Charles I, Cromwell insisted on policies which the people did not want. Like them, he tried to share his authority with Parliament; like them, he failed. The Parliaments he called would support him only if he gave up the policies for which he had fought the war against Charles I, especially the form of Puritan religion in which he and the army believed with all their hearts. But unlike James I and Charles I, Cromwell had an army. When he failed to reach agreement with Parliament, he simply ruled England through the army, the very thing that the Civil War had been fought to prevent Charles I from doing.

The Commonwealth, the name given to the government of

England by Cromwell and the army, was too unpopular in the country to last after Cromwell's death in 1658. The people of England preferred, and have always preferred, to have a king; and anyhow a government which closed the theatres, stopped bull and bear baiting, dancing round the Maypole, and all games on the people's only free day, Sunday, was sure to be unpopular. So in 1660 the army and Parliament joined to call back Charles II, the elder son of Charles I, to rule England in partnership with Parliament.

Since his father's death in 1649 Charles II had had to live abroad, often in great poverty and discomfort. He was handsome, clever, gay, and pleasure-loving, and he was resolved, whatever happened, 'never again to go upon my travels'—in other words never to lose his throne and be driven again into banishment. Therefore, in his many quarrels with Parliament, if he could not get his own way by some clever trick (as he often did), he always gave way before the quarrel became too serious. And on the whole he was careful not to start policies of which he knew Parliament would strongly disapprove.

But his younger brother, James II, who succeeded him in 1685, was quite a different sort of man. He was secretly a Roman Catholic, and his ambition was to make England a Roman Catholic country again. He plotted with the Roman Catholics, even gathering an army on Hounslow Heath so that he could force Parliament and London to obey his orders. This succeeded in uniting all Englishmen against him, even the officers of his own army, and finally (in 1688) the leaders of Parliament decided to ask his nephew and son-in-law, William of Orange, to come over from Holland and become King of England. Nobody supported James, and he fled to France. William of Orange and his wife, James' daughter Mary, became joint King and Queen of England.

Parliament made William and Mary agree to certain things which were set down in a number of new laws, particularly the Bill of Rights (1689) and the Act of Settlement (1701). These Acts stated that the king could not put aside any law passed by Parliament, nor could he himself make any royal proclamations without the consent of Parliament. He could not levy any taxes except through Parliament, and that money for carrying on the government should be voted every year by Parliament. The king no longer had the right to keep a standing army and use it to get his own way. The army was to be controlled by Parliament. The judges were no longer to be dependent on the king, but were to have fixed salaries and could be dismissed only by Parliament. The Act of Settlement even declared that the king depended on the consent of Parliament for his right to be king, and could not claim any divine right—as James I and Charles I had done.

This Glorious Revolution, as it is called, finally decided that in the partnership of king and Parliament Parliament was the senior partner. Never again did a king persist in any policy unless he had the support of a majority in Parliament for it.

CHAPTER 21

THE CABINET AND THE PRIME MINISTER

After the Glorious Revolution the government of the country depended on the policy of the majority in Parliament. Therefore, some organization had to be found which would enable the king and the majority in Parliament to work smoothly together. This organization was the Cabinet system.

The origin of the Cabinet is to be found in the small group of people who formed the King's Council, about whom we read at the end of Chapter 17. During the middle ages these great officers of state—the Chancellor, the Treasurer, the Marshal, the Constable (chief officer of the Household), and others—were bishops or great nobles. Some of these officers were chosen by the king, amongst them being the Chancellor and Treasurer. But others, including the Marshal and Constable, inherited their positions without the king having any say in the matter. All were men of great power and authority in their own right.

At the end of the Wars of the Roses, when nearly all the great noble families of the middle ages had died out, Henry VII appointed to his Council men who did not belong to noble families but were capable—the best men he could find to advise him and to carry out his decisions. Many of these royal councillors were raised to the peerage by either Henry VII or his son Henry VIII, and they founded new noble families of great importance. A few of these peerages still survive, and are very nearly the oldest left in the country. None of these new peers held great hereditary office in the government or great power and authority in his own right. If they were powerful, it was because the king had lent them some of his royal authority. And everyone knew that what the king had lent he could take back again at his pleasure.

This type of Council or Privy Council, as it came to be called, lasted so long as the king was still the senior partner in the partnership between king and Parliament. But after the victory of Parliament it began to develop rapidly into the Cabinet Council.

Charles II found the Privy Council, which had grown to some fifty members, too large and cumbersome; he preferred a more intimate gathering of some five or six men, the holders of the great offices of state, who could meet in a small room or cabinet. This small council came to be called the Cabinet Council or, for short, Cabinet.

After Parliament had established its supremacy in the great struggle with the king, the king began to find that the only way to get on with Parliament was to choose the members of his council, his 'ministers', from men who enjoyed the support of Parliament. At first the king (or queen) was still the active head of the government, and still presided in person over meetings of the council. In 1714, however, when Queen Anne died, she left no child to succeed her, for all her seventeen children had already died, most of them as babies. The next heir to the throne was a great-grandson of James I, the ruler of a small German state called Hanover. This German prince—George I—was 54 when he became King of England, and his son, who succeeded him as George II in 1727, was 31 when his father became King of England. Neither George I nor George II ever learnt to speak English, and their real interests and affections always remained in Hanover. Since they could not speak English, it was clear that neither George I nor George II could preside over the council or be the active head of the government of England. Therefore the chief member of the council, who later came to be known as the Prime Minister, presided instead. For nearly 50 years, the party in Parliament which had brought George I over to England, the 'Whig Party', had a majority in

Parliament. The important men of this party, therefore, formed the Cabinet, and their leader presided over the Cabinet in place of the king. Sir Robert Walpole, the greatest of these men, was, in fact, the first Prime Minister in English history.

When George III succeeded his grandfather George II in 1760, the King of England was again a man who had been born and brought up in England. He, therefore, tried to get back the power which had passed from the king to the Prime Minister during the reigns of his great-grandfather and grandfather. Had he been a wiser and less obstinate man he might well have succeeded. But he was in many ways a foolish ruler, and his reign brought disasters such as the American War of Independence, as a result of which the English colonies in North America broke away and became the independent United States of America. Consequently, George had to give up his attempt to become the active head of his own government; indeed, as he grew older, he suffered from periods of madness during which he was unable to play any part in the government at all. In 1783 William Pitt (the Younger) became Prime Minister at the age of 24, and he remained Prime Minister with only one interval until his death in 1806. By the time he died, the office of Prime Minister was in all essentials what it is today.

The parts which the kings and queens of England since George III have played in the government have varied greatly with the character and ability of each king or queen. George IV and William IV did little to restore the greatness of the English monarchy; but Queen Victoria had a very high idea of the duties and responsibilities of the Queen, and her strong character, great ability, and long reign of nearly 64 years made the monarchy again an institution to be respected and valued.

But no king or queen since George III has tried to become the active head of the government. All have recognized that it is their



A Cabinet meeting at 10, Downing Street

duty to appoint as Prime Minister the leader of the political party with a majority in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister then invites members of his party to become ministers—leaders of the many departments of state which make up the government. There are now some seventy of these ministers—far too many for a Cabinet. So the Prime Minister invites the holders of about twenty of the most important offices to form his Cabinet. Even twenty is too many for detailed discussions, so the Prime Minister consults informally with five or six of his most trusted supporters before bringing any matter before the full Cabinet.

So long as the Prime Minister has a majority in the House of Commons he governs the country in the name of the Queen. If he loses his majority in a General Election, he has to give up his office (and all his ministers automatically go with him). The Queen then asks the leader of the new majority in the House of Commons to become Prime Minister and to form a government. He chooses

his ministers from among his supporters, and governs the country in the Queen's name for as long as he retains the support of the House of Commons. If he loses this he 'goes to the country'—in other words he calls for a General Election, as the result of which his party may or may not be returned to power.

Thus in our present-day constitution the king or queen, as the head of the state, sees that a ministry is formed by the party with a majority in the Commons. The government is carried on in the Queen's name, but she has no control over what the ministry does in her name so long as it has the support of a majority in the Commons. In the next chapter we must see how the decisions of the government in London get carried out all over the United Kingdom, and even, in many cases, in distant parts of the world.

CHAPTER 22

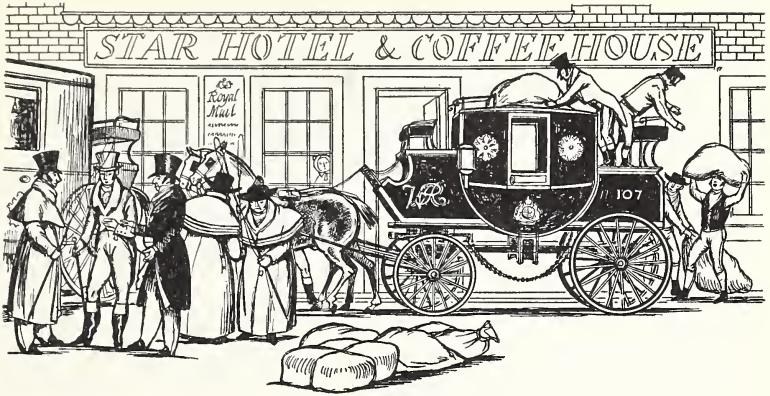
THE BREAKDOWN OF THE OLD SYSTEM AND THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW

Until well into the 19th century Britain managed with an administrative system which was in all essentials the same as the Tudor system described in Chapter 19. By an administrative system we mean the organization through which the government actually gets things done, after Parliament has said what shall and shall not be done. The administration, for example, actually runs the army and navy, collects the taxes, keeps the accounts, and pays the bills. Parliament, having decided what the administration shall or shall not do, then keeps a constant watch to see that the job is properly done and in accordance with the law.

The administration of government has become enormously more complicated since Tudor times. By the early years of the 19th century the Tudor system was proving quite inefficient. It seems that there were about 25,000 administrators (or civil servants) in the pay of the government in 1815. About 5,000 of these worked in the government offices in London—the Chancery, the Treasury, the Exchequer, the Admiralty, the War Office, the Post Office, the Home Office, the Foreign Office, and other smaller, less important offices. The other 20,000 were minor officials scattered all over the British Isles: 1,500 postal officials managing the mail coaches and sailing boats which carried the letters; 9,000 officials occupied in collecting customs duties on all goods brought into the British Isles and in preventing smuggling; 7,500 excisemen who collected taxes on all sorts of articles which were not imported but made as well as used within the British Isles—articles such as soap, candles, bricks, glass, leather, paper, salt—in fact, nearly everything the people used in their daily lives.

This administrative system was inefficient for three reasons. First, some of the offices of the central government were survivals from the remote past and no longer served a useful purpose; others were hasty creations to meet sudden emergencies. There was little careful planning, and the system no longer met the needs of the British people in the 19th century. Secondly, the higher posts were often filled by people chosen because they were relatives and friends of important members of Parliament rather than because they were suitable. They drew their salaries, but they often did no work or did it very badly. Thirdly, there were no officials of the central government outside London to deal with many of the essential concerns of a modern state—public order, road making and repair, relief of the poor and sick. All these vital matters were in the hands of the Justices of the Peace (magistrates) in the counties and of the town councillors in the boroughs, rich country gentlemen or tradesmen over whom the government and Parliament had hardly any control.

As we read in Chapters 11 and 12, the magistrates of Linfordshire and the councillors of Ladyborough levied their own taxes ('rates') and spent the money very much as they pleased. Through Parliament they made the law, and through the Quarter Sessions and the borough councils they administered nearly all the laws which affected the ordinary people of the country. The central government affected the lives of ordinary people only through the tax collector, the army and navy enlistment officers, the judges of assize who dealt with crimes too serious for the magistrates (by the end of the 18th century nearly 200 offences were punishable by death), and the officials of the post office. In 1830 there was hardly any real central administration in Britain outside the collection and management of the revenue, the defence of the country, and the carriage of letters. Of the £50 million spent by the govern-

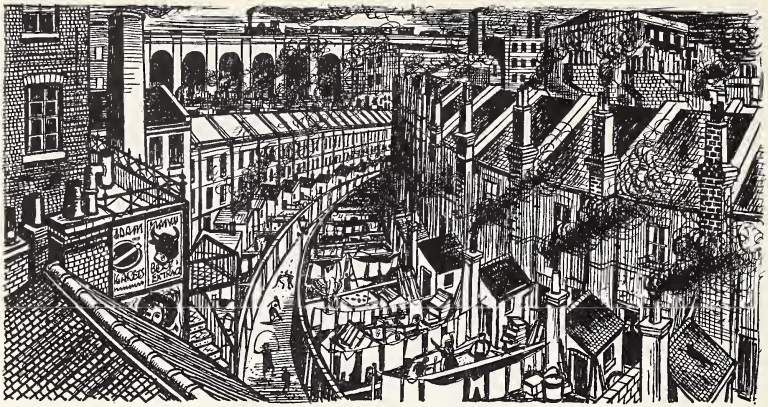


An early 19th-century mail coach

ment in 1830, £6 million was enough to maintain the king and the royal family and the whole of the central government.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, however, extraordinary changes known as the Industrial Revolution took place in Britain. In the 80 years from 1750 to 1831 the population of Britain doubled, and in the next 60 years it doubled again, reaching 33 millions. The size of the population was increasing and the people's methods of living and working were changing in a manner never before seen in a great country in the whole history of the world. A large part of this rapidly growing population earned its living in the new factories, and since factories employing large numbers of people must be in towns, there was an enormous growth of towns. By 1851 about half the population of Britain were town dwellers.

The huge new towns brought problems which the old administrative system was quite unable to solve. Profiteering landlords



Slums in the 19th century

and jerry builders ran up houses as quickly, as cheaply, and as close together as they could, saving space by crowding families into single rooms or thrusting them underground into cellars, and saving money by using inferior building materials and by providing inadequate drainage. In this way the slums of our great cities were created, making a problem which is still with us today. The central government did nothing to stop it, because they lacked any organization through which they could work. The magistrates and borough councillors did nothing to stop it, because among them were the people who reaped the huge and rapid profits.

The result of this neglect of the health and well-being of the people was a series of most deadly outbreaks of cholera. In 1831 there were 50,000 deaths in Britain from cholera; in 1848–9 60,000, of which a quarter were in London; in 1853–4 25,000, of which nearly half were in London.

Cholera is no respecter of persons, and since the governing

classes were in nearly as much danger as the mass of the people, they insisted on the central government setting up some organization for dealing with public health. There were also public-spirited social reformers, such as Edwin Chadwick and Lord Shaftesbury, who worked for higher motives. In 1844 a Royal Commission on Public Health reported that 'the annual loss of life from filth and bad sanitation is greater than the loss of life in any war undertaken by this country in the present century'. When a second cholera epidemic followed in 1848–9, Parliament established a Board of Health to act for five years. Its duty was to see that the borough councils (which, as we learned in Chapter 13, had been reformed in 1835) provided pure drinking-water and disposed of sewage so that it could not poison drinking-water or food.

Edwin Chadwick, the head of the Board of Health, was, unfortunately, a tactless Lancashireman, and his energetic actions put up the backs of the members of Parliament, most of whom still believed that every owner of property ought to be able to do exactly what he liked with his own, regardless of the harm which he did to other people, and that the government's chief duty was to enable property owners to get as much enjoyment and profit from their property as possible. Therefore, in 1854 Parliament refused to continue the existence of the Board of Health, preferring as *The Times* newspaper put it, 'to take our chance of cholera than to be bullied into health'.

But the population and the towns continued to grow, and it became more and more obvious that the central government had to regulate people's lives for their own convenience and safety. In 1871 a Local Government Board was established to see that the borough councils, the magistrates, and the many drainage, water-supply, and street-paving boards which had sprung up all over the country did their work properly. In 1919 this Local Government

Board became the Ministry of Health. By 1951 the regulation of local government and of the lives of the people had become so detailed that a great part of the work of the Ministry of Health had to be passed over to a new department, the Ministry of Local Government and Planning. We can understand how complicated is the work of the central government of Britain when we reflect that if all the people in the whole world went to live in the United States of America they would be scarcely more crowded together than the people of England and Wales are now!

In this chapter we have traced the growth of the large and efficient organization through which the central government supervises and controls the local government about which we read in the first part of this book. But at the same time the central government was also interfering more and more with other aspects of the people's lives, and its activity was steadily increasing in all fields. New boards and ministries were being created and continually grew—the Colonial Office in 1854, the India Office in 1858, the Board of Education in 1899, the Ministry of Labour in 1916, and a whole group of new ministries at the end of the First World War in 1919. In 1870 winning a place in an open competitive examination was made the only way of becoming a member of the civil service; and the old method of appointing people, however inefficient, because they were relations or friends of important people, came to an end. The number of civil servants increased from 25,000 in 1815 to 666,000 in 1953, and all over the world the honesty and efficiency of the British civil service is admired.

CHAPTER 23

THE COMING OF DEMOCRACY

We have read how the power of government gradually passed from the king to Parliament. But in the days of the Revolution of 1688, when Parliament finally won control of the government, the great mass of ordinary people still had no say in how the country should be run. It was the owners of property who had always controlled Parliament. Now we will see how Britain became a real democracy.

The foundations of our present-day system of electing members of Parliament were laid by the Great Reform Act of 1832. We have seen in Chapter 15 how unfair the arrangements were before 1832. In Ladyborough and Linford and many other boroughs, each returning two members, the members were chosen by the borough corporation or by the burgesses. Some boroughs, such as Old Sarum and Dunwich, which had really ceased to exist at all, still returned two members each, and these were not elected at all but chosen by some local magnate. The great new industrial towns of the Midlands and North, such as Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, and Leeds, returned no members at all. Each county, from the smallest—Rutland—to the largest—Yorkshire, returned two members, regardless of the great differences in their size and population.

It took an irresistible pressure from the whole mass of the people to force Parliament to reform itself in 1832. The result of the reform was that, as far as possible, one member represented more or less the same number of voters in every part of Britain. The right to vote was no longer confined to landowners, but was given to the middle class, the prosperous shopkeepers of the towns and farmers in the counties. After 1832, about one man in six in England and

Wales had the right to vote (no women could vote until 1918). This seems to us nowadays to be still far from a real democracy, but it was a great step forwards.

The working classes were bitterly disappointed by the Act, for the vote was still largely in the hands of employers—not the working class. So working people and their friends still continued to press for an extension of the franchise—that is, for more people to have the vote. In 1867 and 1884 the skilled workers in town and country were given the vote, and members were again re-distributed more evenly over the country to make up for the continued growth of the population and its shift from one part of the country to another. After 1884, therefore, one man in every three had the right to vote.

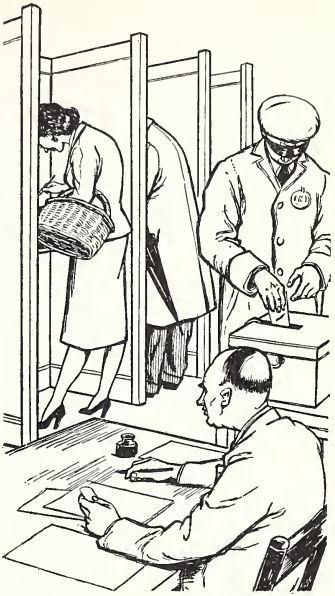
It was not until 1918, after the First World War, that any women had the right to vote, although two of England's greatest rulers, Queen Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria, had been women. By 1928 all men and all women over the age of 21 years had the right to vote.

But giving all adults the right to vote and seeing that each vote had about the same influence in electing a member of Parliament was not by itself enough to make Britain a democratic country. So long as voting was public, many people were afraid to vote for anyone except the candidate chosen by their employer or landlord for fear they might lose their jobs or their homes. Voting became a genuine right to choose only after the Ballot Act of 1872, which made voting secret.

Since 1872 the names of the candidates who wish to become members of Parliament are printed on thousands of slips of paper. Each voter is given one of these slips. He places a cross against the name of the candidate whom he wishes to see elected, and puts his 'ballot paper' through a slit in a special sealed box, rather like a

post box. In this way nobody can tell how the voter has used his vote.

When voting is finished, the boxes are all taken to some convenient place, such as the Town Hall, where the boxes are opened, and the ballot papers sorted and counted. The candidate with the most votes becomes the member of Parliament for that district or 'constituency'. This is the method of election we use today.



Voting today

After 1928, therefore, the members of the House of Commons are elected by a secret ballot of all the adult people of Great Britain, except peers or those who are insane or in prison. The party, therefore, which forms the government is the party chosen by the majority of the people. But the members of the House of Lords are not chosen by the people. Their right to sit is passed down with the title from father to eldest son. Until 1910, a bill had to be passed not only through the House of Commons but also in exactly the same way through the House of Lords before it became law. The House of Lords, therefore, was able to prevent the will of the people from being carried out.

During the 19th century, as the government took on more and more responsibility for the welfare of all its people—especially for their health and education, more and more money was needed. The obvious way to get this money was to tax rich people in order

to make the lives of poor people happier. The House of Lords, where sat many of the richest men in the country, tried to slow up this expenditure of money on public welfare, and at the beginning of the 20th century they refused to allow the government's plans to pass into law.

The Liberal Party, who were the party who wanted to bring in reform, therefore decided that the power of the House of Lords ought to be limited. As they had a majority in the House of Commons, they brought in a bill proposing that in future the Lords should have no power at all over laws about taxes, and that they could only delay other laws for two years. The Conservatives, the party who in general favoured leaving things as they were, opposed the bill; so the Liberals 'went to the country'—that is they called for a General Election. The General Election showed that a majority in the whole country agreed with the Liberals; and so the Lords gave way, even though the great majority of them really opposed the change. In 1949 the right of the House of Lords to delay a bill was reduced from two years to one year. So now the House of Lords has hardly any power, except the power to make the House of Commons think again.

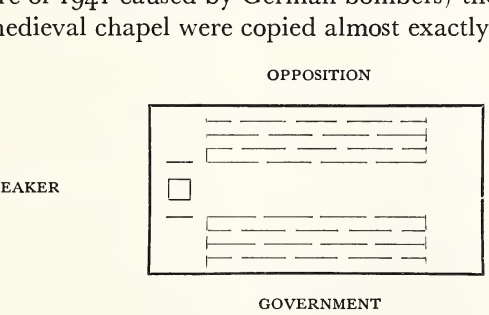
Thus Britain is now a fully democratic country, with a government which cannot be prevented from carrying out the will of the people. In the next chapter we must see how Parliament goes about its business.

CHAPTER 24

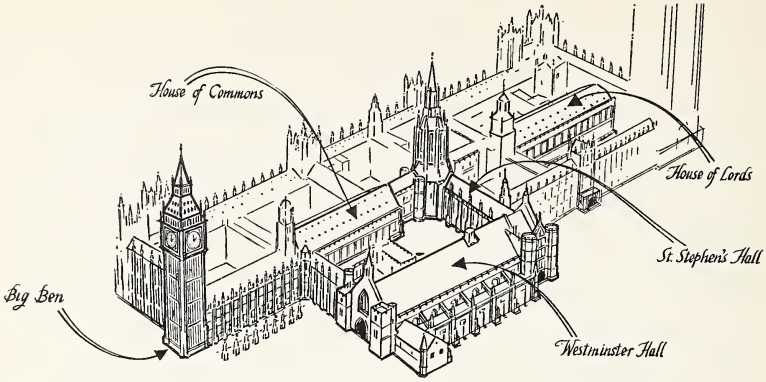
PARLIAMENT AT WORK

We have now followed the growth of the central government from the council and household of the Norman kings to the democratic Parliament and all-embracing civil service of the present day. As we have gone along we have learned many details about how Parliament is organized and does its work. Let us now gather these details together and finish the picture.

The buildings in which Parliament meets stand on the site of the royal palace of Westminster, which was burned down in 1834. The Commons had met for nearly three centuries before that date in the chapel of the palace, dedicated to St. Stephen. The size and shape of this chapel and the arrangement of the seats in it (facing inwards along the length of the building) have had a decisive influence on English political methods. These methods so much depended on this arrangement of seating that when the House of Commons had to be rebuilt (after the fire of 1834, and again after the fire of 1941 caused by German bombers) the size and shape of the medieval chapel were copied almost exactly.



This arrangement of the seats has always divided the members into two distinct groups. As the practice grew up during the 17th



The Houses of Parliament

and 18th centuries of basing the government on the party with a majority in the Commons, it became natural for the government supporters to sit on one side of the House and their opponents (the Opposition) on the other. The chairman of the Commons (called the Speaker, because in the middle ages his duty was to speak for the Commons when the king asked their opinion) has his great canopied chair at the top of what used to be the altar steps of the chapel. The government party sit on his right, with ministers on the front bench nearest the Speaker. The Opposition sit on his left, with their leaders on the front bench nearest the Speaker.

This division of members, first imposed by the shape and seating arrangements of St. Stephen's Chapel, into two distinct groups—Government and Opposition—has helped to prevent more than two large political parties existing in Britain at any one time. From the middle of the 19th century until the First World War these two parties were the Conservatives and the Liberals, sometimes one having a majority and sometimes the other. But as more

workers got the vote, they began to want a party which would put forward the point of view of the working class—and the Labour Party was founded in 1899. In 1900 the first two official members of the party were elected to Parliament, and in 1906 there were some 43 of them. With the extension of the vote to the great mass of unskilled workers in 1918, the Labour Party rapidly replaced the Liberals as the alternative to the Conservatives in forming a government. In 1923 191 Labour members were elected, 159 Liberals, and 258 Conservatives, and the first Labour government was formed, with the support of the Liberals. It was not until 1945 that Labour had a complete majority. Meanwhile the number of Liberal members continued to decline until, at the General Election of 1951, only six members survived in the House of Commons of one of the greatest political parties in English history. Their place as the party in favour of change has been taken by the Labour Party.

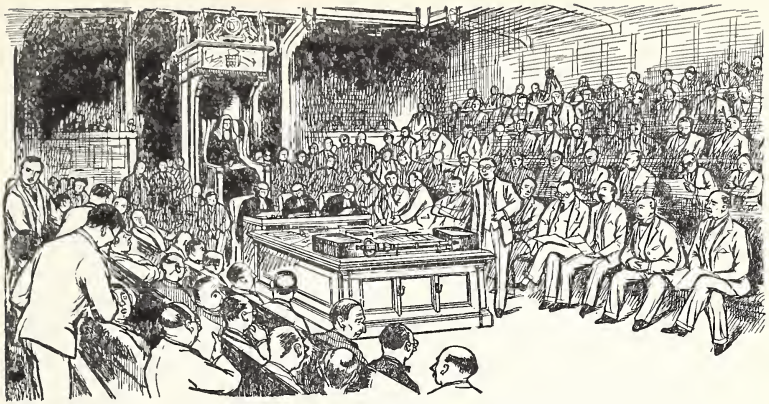
The fact that the House of Commons is small (there are seats on the floor of the House for only 346 of the 625 members) has resulted in a very intimate, almost conversational style of discussion or 'debate'. A member who wishes to speak must 'catch the Speaker's eye'. The Speaker, who has a list of members wishing to speak in the debate, calls on members to speak alternately from the two sides of the House—that is, for and against the proposal before the House. He calls leading members of the Government and Opposition sitting in the front benches before ordinary members—'back benchers' as they are named.

The member called on to speak rises in his place and begins his speech with the words 'Mr. Speaker . . .'. Everything he says must be addressed to the Speaker, never to the other members, and on no account to any individual member. The purpose of this first rule is to prevent the debate becoming personal and to keep the

discussion on a high level and strictly to the subject under discussion. Even in spite of this rule, feelings do often get roused, and the Speaker often has difficulty in keeping the debate calm and reasonable.

If a member breaks one of the many and strict rules of the House, the Speaker immediately 'calls him to order'. If the Speaker seems to have missed some breach of the rules, any member may call the Speaker's attention to the breach. This is called 'speaking on a point of order', and to catch the Speaker's attention the member speaks sitting in his place with a hat on his head. In the old days members attending Parliament generally wore top hats. Now that members often do not have hats at all, comic incidents have occurred when members have placed strange objects on their heads in the hope that the Speaker would accept them as hats. Except on points of order, no member may speak more than once in a debate.

New laws introduced into the House for discussion are called 'bills'. Each bill has to go through four stages in both Houses (Commons and Lords) before it can become an 'act'—that is, law. The First Reading consists only of announcing the title of the bill and supplying members with printed copies. The Second Reading is a discussion of the general principles of the bill, with a vote at the end of the discussion. If the bill passes its Second Reading it is considered word by word 'in committee'. In the case of very important bills the whole House acts as the committee, the Chairman of Committees presiding instead of the Speaker. The rules of debate in committee are much less strict; for example, each member may speak as many times as he can catch the chairman's eye. Less important bills are considered by committees consisting of only some of the members, sitting in a small committee room, not in the House itself. The bill as altered by the committee is then brought



A debate in the House of Commons

before the whole House again for its Third Reading. In this debate matters of principle and of detail may be discussed and voted on. At the end of the Third Reading a final vote is taken, 'That this bill be now read the third time'. If a majority of the members vote in favour, the bill has then passed all its stages. Unless it is a money bill, it must then go through all these stages again in the House of Lords.

When a bill has passed through both Houses, it is presented to the Queen for approval. No king or queen since Queen Anne has refused to approve a bill which has been passed by both Houses of Parliament—indeed, it would not be possible now for any king or queen to refuse approval. When the royal approval has been announced, the bill is an act—it has become part of the law of the land.

There is one procedure of the House of Commons which exists in no Parliaments except those of the British Commonwealth of

Nations, and that is 'Question Time'. This is one of the most valuable defences of the ordinary man and woman against the great power of the government and the civil service today. For an hour at the beginning of each day's business (after the prayers with which each sitting is always opened) members can question and cross-question a minister about any detail of the policy or conduct of the department for which that minister is responsible. In this way a minister can be made to explain to the House anything his department has done or proposes to do. If the House does not approve what the minister's department has done, it can make clear its disapproval, and the minister, who must keep the goodwill of the House, will hasten to remove the cause of complaint. Any individual person can write to his member of Parliament and ask him to ask a question in the House, and the M.P., if he thinks it wise, will do so. In this way we are protected against the mistakes or ill-considered actions of the government or of the civil service.

CHAPTER 25

GETTING AND SPENDING

EVERY year in the first half of April the Chancellor of the Exchequer 'opens his Budget' in the House of Commons. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was originally a minor official of the medieval Exchequer which we read about in Chapter 17. But during the 19th century, when the government began to spend more money, he became one of the most important members of the government. Today when the government takes and spends itself well over one-third of the money which the people earn, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is even more important. He decides how much money the government can spend each year, and how this money can most fairly and most conveniently be taken from the people by taxation.

Budget Day is the day when the Chancellor (not to be confused with the Lord Chancellor, the chairman of the House of Lords and head of all the judges) tells the House of Commons how much the government must spend and how he thinks the money should be provided. During the Chancellor's speech, which is one of the greatest and most exciting occasions of the Parliamentary year, the Commons sit as a committee—the Committee of Ways and Means. This enables them to discuss in detail the Chancellor's very detailed proposals. The discussion goes on for many days after the Chancellor has 'opened his Budget'; and when all his proposals have been accepted, perhaps with some alterations, the House of Commons, sitting as the Committee of Ways and Means, reports to the House of Commons itself that the budget proposals have been approved. Then a bill, the Finance Bill, is introduced into the House in order to make the budget proposals into law. This bill goes through all the stages described in the last chapter (except

that, since this is a money bill, the House of Lords has no say) and then becomes the Finance Act. This is the law which states what taxes everyone must pay for the next twelve months.

Nothing makes us realize more clearly how much the activity of government has increased in the last 100 years or so than the vast growth of government expenditure. When we speak of 'free' education, or 'free' medical treatment, or 'free' libraries we tend to forget that all these services are paid for by the government with money we have earned. If everybody kept this in mind, people might value these 'free' services much more highly than they sometimes do, and they might be more careful not to waste or misuse them and more anxious to see that the services are run efficiently and economically.

Let us look at some simple figures which show what government expenditure has been since 1830, and then let us try to account for the vast increase.

	1830	1913	1924	1938	1953
National Debt . .	29	24	357	230	700
Defence . . .	15	77	115	262	1,637
Government Expenses .	6	22	55	124	402
Social Services . .	—	41	184	324	1,521
TOTAL . .	50	164	711	940	4,260

Each figure in this table is in millions of pounds: for example, total government expenditure in 1830 was £50 million. 1830 shows the amount and distribution of government expenditure before the Great Reform Act of 1832. The payment on the National Debt (interest on the money the government has borrowed and some repayment of debt each year) is so large because the government had to borrow a great deal of money to pay for the long wars

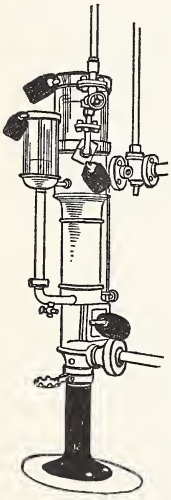
England fought from 1793 to 1815 against the French Revolution and Napoleon. We see that in 1830 no money at all was spent on social services. 1913 was the last year before the First World War. The National Debt was less because there had been no great war, and the social services had begun to cost something. 1924 was a normal year after the First World War. The huge increase in the National Debt is because of the war, and more has been spent on defence because of the unsettled state of the world after the First World War. The cost of the social services has increased by more than four times. In 1938 a period of peace has brought down the National Debt; but in 1953, a typical year after the Second World War, the National Debt has again enormously increased. Again the unsettled state of the world and the need to defend ourselves against Communism have rushed up the cost of defence. The social services, which cover all the money spent on education, pensions, the National Health Service, subsidies to keep down the price of food and the rents of houses, and many other things, now cost nearly five times what they cost in 1938. This item, starting from nothing in 1830, is now the second largest item in the budget. When world security is better established so that large standing armed forces do not have to be kept, the upkeep of the social services will be far the largest government expense.

One reason why the government now spends so much more money than it did is that the value of money itself has fallen, in other words things cost much more. For every pound which the government spent in 1913 the government today has to spend over £3 to buy the same thing. Another reason is that the cost of fighting the two World Wars has left a heavy debt, and that vast sums of money still have to be spent on defending ourselves in a world which has grown ever more dangerous since 1900. Another and more satisfactory reason is the great expense of the Welfare State,

started by the Liberal governments in the years before the First World War, which offers to all British people security from want and reasonable opportunities in life. Partly because of this, government expenses also have greatly increased.

The government collects these huge sums of money largely by taxation, the taxation being arranged so that people who have only a little money pay small taxes and people who have a lot of money pay heavy taxes. This is called progressive taxation.

There are two main kinds of taxes. The first kind, 'direct taxes', are taken directly from the money people earn or which comes to them from their investments. The most important kind of direct tax is income tax, the tax which has to be paid every year on the money, either earned or unearned, which people receive each year. If you earn very little indeed, you pay very little or nothing. If you earn much, you pay much. A very rich man in 1953 might have paid to the government as much as 19*s.* of every £1 on some of his income. Death duties are also important direct taxes. When a man dies leaving more than a certain amount of property, the government takes part of it. The more a man leaves, the bigger the proportion that goes to the government.



Excise padlocks in an alcohol distillery

The other kind, indirect taxes, are added to the price of things you buy. It is possible to avoid indirect taxes, more or less, by not buying the things on which these taxes are collected. The advantages of indirect taxes, so long as they are put on luxury goods and not on necessities, is that people often pay them without noticing and objecting to them so much; and also very poor people can to a

certain extent avoid paying them by not buying the things which are taxed.

Indirect taxes are collected on almost all goods brought into this country from abroad (customs duties), and on many things made in this country (excise duties). The heaviest customs or excise duties are on things which people enjoy but can do without, such as beer, wine, spirits, tobacco, petrol, football pools and betting, and entertainments (such as the cinema, football matches, horse and dog races).

During the Second World War, when the government had to have money urgently, a new and very heavy indirect tax, the Purchase Tax, was invented; a tax added to the price of everything people buy, except the absolute necessities of life. On some luxuries such as furs and jewellery, the tax is three-quarters of the wholesale price.

These are the Chancellor of the Exchequer's estimates for the government's income in 1953. These figures also are in millions of pounds.

Income Tax	1,909	
Death Duties	160	
Other Direct Taxes	367	
TOTAL DIRECT TAXES		2,436
Tobacco	615	
Beer, wine, spirits	372	
Purchase Tax	260	
Petrol	290	
Entertainments	44	
Betting	29	
Other Customs and Excise	115	
TOTAL CUSTOMS AND EXCISE		1,725
Motor Vehicles Duty		69
TOTAL TAXES		4,230

The government has other sources of revenue besides taxation, and these more than meet the gap between estimated expenditure (£4,260 million) and taxation (£4,230 million). Most Chancellors prefer to budget so that they have a surplus to meet unexpected expenditure or to pay off some of the National Debt.

These taxes which the people of Britain have to pay are heavy, and as well as these, as we read in Part I, people also have to pay rates to the county councils and county borough councils. In 1950, for example, over £300 million were paid in rates to local government authorities in addition to the vast sums paid in taxes to the central government.

CHAPTER 26

HOW DISPUTES ARE SETTLED AND LAW BREAKERS PUNISHED

FEW British institutions have developed from very early in our history with so little change as our system of law and our ways of deciding what is just. As we read in Chapter 11, Henry II ordered that the king's judges should travel regularly from London to hold their assize courts in all the counties throughout the kingdom. They have continued to do so every year from the 12th century to the present day. The jury of twelve of his fellow-citizens, which alone can decide if an Englishman is guilty or not guilty of any serious crime, has changed very little since it replaced trial by ordeal in the 13th century.

When the judges go out from London on circuit in their robes of scarlet and ermine, they go in pairs. One judge in each pair tries criminal cases, the other civil cases, for a clear distinction is made between civil law and criminal law.

Civil law is the law regulating the many duties which one citizen may owe another. For example, if Mrs. Smith goes to Mrs. Baker's house to work and there falls downstairs and breaks her leg, because there was a loose board on the stairs, Mrs. Smith can go to the civil court and claim damages from Mrs. Baker. If the judge decides that Mrs. Baker had been negligent, and that therefore the accident was her fault, he will order that Mrs. Baker pays Mrs. Smith so much money to compensate her for her loss of working time and for her suffering.

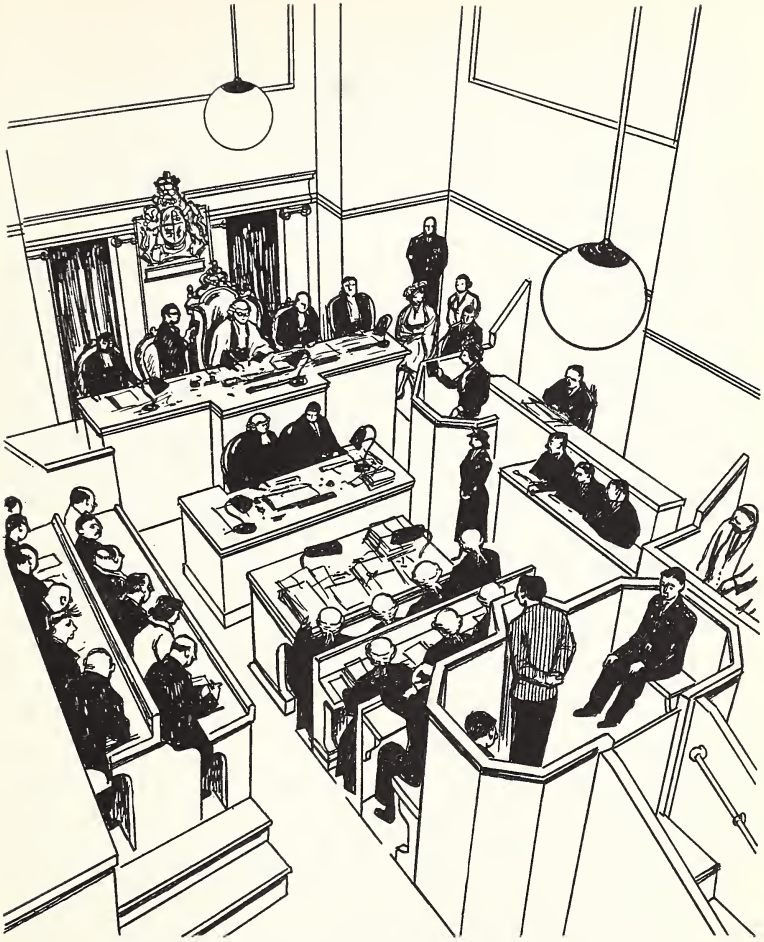
Again, if someone accepts money to perform certain services or to deliver goods on a certain day, and fails to carry out his agreement (or 'contract'), he will not only have to repay the money he received, but he will also have to pay a further sum to cover any

loss he may have caused by failing to keep his contract. An actress, for example, may sign a contract with a theatre manager to appear in a play in London, and instead may go off to Hollywood. The theatre manager can then go to law and recover damages for 'breach of contract'. Civil law is most complicated, with many branches. Both parties in a civil case are private persons: Smith *versus* Baker, for example, in the case of Mrs. Smith's broken leg.

Criminal law is usually much simpler. The general state of law and order in the country is called 'the Queen's Peace'. If any person disturbs the general state of law and order, for example, by getting drunk and punching his neighbour on the nose, or by forcing an entry into a house and stealing property, he is said to have broken the Queen's Peace. Therefore the Queen, acting through the local chief of police in minor cases and through the Director of Public Prosecutions in important cases, takes the offender to court and, if he is proved guilty, secures his punishment. Prosecutions are, therefore, always in the form *Regina* (*Queen*) versus *Sykes* (or whatever is the name of the offender). *Versus* is usually abbreviated '*v*'.

Nearly all criminal cases are dealt with by the magistrates, about whom we read in Chapters 11 and 13. In 1952 thirty-five criminal cases were dealt with in magistrates' courts for every one dealt with in the more important courts—Quarter Sessions, Assizes, or the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey in London. Most of the cases dealt with by magistrates are minor breaches of the law—parking motor cars in the wrong place, riding bicycles without lights, betting in the streets, and the like. Such offences are punished by fines or at the most imprisonment up to three months.

Serious crimes are punished with heavier penalties, and the accused has the right to trial by jury. The case is first brought to the magistrates' court, and if there is enough evidence against the



Reconstruction of an assize court for a television programme

accused, the magistrates commit the accused for trial by Quarter Sessions, Assize Court, or (in the Greater London area) the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey. Each of these courts sits with a jury three or four times every year. Quarter Sessions consist of a bench of magistrates with an experienced lawyer as their professional chairman. (In large towns, instead of magistrates, a special judge called a Recorder presides.) Quarter Sessions can deal with all except the most serious and complicated cases, such as murder, which are reserved for the Assizes or the Central Criminal Court. The Assize Courts and the Central Criminal Court are each presided over by a single judge from the High Court of Justice in London. They can impose all penalties, even the death penalty and imprisonment for life.

One of the most important provisions of English criminal law is that the prosecution has to prove the accused guilty; the accused does not have to prove his innocence. After the judge has told them what the law is, the jury of twelve of the accused's fellow-citizens has the responsibility of deciding whether the accused is guilty or not guilty. Then, if the jury is all agreed that the accused is guilty, the judge (within the limits allowed by law) decides how severely he shall be punished. The accused can appeal against the judge to the Court of Criminal Appeal, and even in some special instances to the House of Lords.

Magistrates' courts also deal with a few minor civil cases; but most such cases are dealt with in the County Courts. These County Courts were founded in 1846, and are quite different from the ancient County Courts or shire moots which we read about in Chapter 4. There are about 400 modern County Courts all over the country, each with a single professional judge, whose duty it is to give cheap and simple justice in civil cases which do not involve large sums of money.

Important civil cases, sometimes involving very large sums of money indeed, are heard either by the Assize judge who hears civil cases or by one of the specialized branches of the High Court of Justice in London. There are full arrangements for appeals in civil cases, sometimes even to the House of Lords.

A very important point about British justice is that the government cannot in any way influence the decisions of magistrates or of any of the various kinds of judges—County Court Judges, Chairmen of Quarter Sessions, Recorders, Judges of the High Court, Lord Justices of Appeal (the judges in the Court of Appeal), or Lords of Appeal in Ordinary (the judges in the House of Lords). The government appoints all these officers, but once they are appointed the government cannot control them. Their salaries are fixed and can be altered only by Act of Parliament. They can be dismissed only by Parliament. So in any dispute with the government, a citizen of this country can always be absolutely sure of a fair hearing by the law courts and of a decision strictly in accordance with the law. Politics cannot influence the course of justice. This is one of the essential features of a true democracy.

SECTION III

OTHER INSTITUTIONS

CHAPTER 27

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ARMY AND THE NAVY

When the Billings rowed up the River Lin in the 5th century to find a new home in Britain, all the men carried arms—axes, swords, spears, and shields—and were always ready to fight. They had to fight and beat the British before they could settle down in their new home and call the land theirs. For many years they had to defend themselves against the efforts of the British to win back the land, and perhaps also against other parties of their own people following them across the North Sea. In such troubled and unsettled times there was no specialized army to defend people unskilled in the use of weapons. The Billings were a people in arms. Every able-bodied man had his weapons, knew how to use them, and was always ready to do so at a moment's notice.

But as the generations passed and the people increased in numbers, life gradually became more settled and peaceful. Every able-bodied man still possessed arms and was skilled in their use. But weapons no longer had to be kept close at hand during the daily work of tilling the soil and tending the animals. Attacks came at longer and longer intervals as England was gradually united into fewer little countries, and at last under a single king. Every able-bodied Englishman could be called on by the king to defend his country, but once England was united under a single king the sea formed a first and most effective defence. Except in the greatest emergency, a small number of armed men was enough to maintain order and defend the country. The great mass of

Englishmen could raise crops and animals in peace without having to leave their work to go and fight. The difference between a specialized army and an unwarlike civil population had begun to appear.

This tendency to build up a special class of fighting men was greatly increased by developments in weapons and methods of fighting. Armour grew gradually but steadily from a simple leather jerkin to the complete and elaborate plate armour of the 15th century. Horses became necessary as the increasing weight of armour became too much for a man to bear himself. The small army which Duke William of Normandy brought across the Channel in 1066 to conquer England was an army of heavily armoured, mounted knights. It defeated the king of England's men, who still fought on foot, wearing only light armour and wielding great two-handed swords and battle-axes. From this time until the time of Henry VII the core of the English army consisted of heavily armoured, mounted knights. The cost of such armour and horses was quite beyond the means of the ordinary Englishman who tilled the fields and tended the animals. So a special class of men skilled in the art of war, called knights, developed. Ordinary men had to work for these knights so as to set them free to learn and practise the use of increasingly complicated arms and armour, and to make them rich enough to afford these arms, armour, and horses. This is the military side of the feudal system, which we talked about from other points of view in Chapter 16.

But every Englishman could still be called out when necessary to defend his country with the simple and cheap weapons of the foot soldier. These changed little in the 600 years between the arrival of the Billings and the Norman Conquest. But during the 13th century the English learned from the Welsh the use of a most



Practising with the longbow

deadly new weapon. This was the dreaded longbow—6 feet long, drawn right back to the right ear, and shooting a 3-foot arrow.

We are inclined to think of a bow as a toy, but the medieval longbow was so effective that the English archers, properly commanded, were masters of every battlefield. No armour was proof against their arrows. At the Battle of Falkirk in 1298 against the Scots, and Crécy (1346), Poitiers (1356), and Agincourt (1415) against the French they won important victories for their kings, often with terrible slaughter of their enemies. Other nations would probably have liked to adopt this wonderful weapon. But the strength required to draw the longbow back to the right ear was so great that nobody could do it unless he had been brought up to it from boyhood, drawing stronger and stronger bows as he grew up. There were strict laws in England making practice with the bow compulsory for every man except knights and forbidding all other sports. Henry VIII forbade practice at any distance less

than a furlong (220 yards), though the really accurate range of the longbow was 80 to 100 yards.

Although gunpowder and guns had been used since the 14th century, it was not until the reign of Elizabeth I that the musket replaced the longbow as the missile weapon of the English foot-soldier. But the longbow had many advantages over the musket—not only over the crude matchlock which displaced the bow in 1595, but even over the perfected flintlock of the 18th century. As late as 1792 a colonel in an English infantry regiment published a book arguing that the longbow was a more effective weapon than the flintlock. These are the reasons he gave:

1. A man can shoot as accurately with a bow as with a musket, and the effective range is much the same.
2. He can shoot four arrows in the time taken to fire and reload the muzzle-loading musket.
3. The enemy are not hidden by the smoke made by his gunpowder.
4. A flight of arrows coming without the noise of firearms terrifies the enemy.
5. An arrow sticking in any part of a man puts him out of action until it is removed (the arrowhead was barbed, so it could not just be pulled out).
6. Bows and arrows are more easily made anywhere than muskets, gunpowder, and shot.

All this is, of course, very true. But the ease and speed with which a man could be trained to use a musket, compared with the lifelong training required by the longbow, was an overwhelming argument in favour of the musket.

By the time the musket displaced the longbow the clumsy fully-armoured knights of the middle ages had quite disappeared from



A pikeman and a musketeer of 1608

the battlefield. Their place had been taken by cavalry, whose weapons and use in war changed but little until they, too, disappeared early in the First World War. Cavalrymen wore light armour (breast and backplates and helmets, like the Life Guards who escort the Queen at the present time, but less gaudy and more practical than those of the Life Guards); they were armed with lances, swords, and pistols. They could not charge so long as the enemy's musketeers and pikemen (foot soldiers armed with spears 16 feet long, to protect the musketeers while they reloaded) and, above all, his artillery stood firm. But when their own side's gunfire and musket-fire had shaken the enemy and had perhaps reduced them to confusion, then a cavalry charge often completed their defeat. They were also used for chasing a defeated enemy and preventing his escape to fight again another day.

Until Tudor times there was little difference between merchant

ships and warships. Sea battles consisted of running alongside the enemy so that the soldiers carried in each ship could fight it out hand to hand. Alfred was the first English king to build ships to defend his island kingdom; he did so because in his reign (871–901) there were very few merchant ships for him to borrow, and England was under very heavy attack by the Vikings. But as English overseas trade increased, and merchants came to own plenty of ships, the king borrowed these in war-time and used them as the royal navy. At the end of the war they were returned to their owners. Thus in time of peace the king was saved the expense of keeping up a fleet of special warships.

This ancient system was changed early in the Tudor period. For the English invented a new way of fighting at sea, which made their ships as much mistresses of the sea as their archers had been masters of the battlefield. They mounted cannon along the sides of their ships, firing through gaps in the bulwarks and through holes in the ships' sides. Instead of going right alongside the enemy and fighting it out hand to hand, they stood off and shot the enemy to pieces with their cannon. This is how the small English ships defeated the much larger ships of the Spanish Armada in 1588. The Spanish ships were too clumsy and unmanageable to use their guns, and preferred to fight by coming alongside and using their soldiers. But the English ships, smaller, faster, and more manageable, kept at a distance and punished the Spaniards with their cannon.

But these gun-carrying ships were specialized warships. Henry VII and Henry VIII began to build them, though for many years longer merchant ships had to be borrowed in war-time to bring the Royal Navy up to strength. Ever since then England has had a permanent Royal Navy, in peace as well as in war.

The Spanish Armada carried many soldiers. It was on its way

to Dunkirk to pick up an army which was waiting there to invade England. Queen Elizabeth I had called out every Englishman to defend his country. As obliged by law, every man was trained in the use of arms—sword, pike, bow, or the new firearm, the arquebus—and each parish had its store of arms. 40,000 men stood ready to fight the Spaniards if they landed, the militia of each shire commanded by its lord lieutenant. But had not Drake and Hawkins been able to prevent the Spanish soldiers landing in England, there is no doubt that the skill of the professional Spanish soldiers would have been too much for the amateur English soldiers, just called from their ploughs and looms and shops to defend their country.

CHAPTER 28

THE STANDING ARMY AND NAVY

THE militia of the shires, based on the legal duty of every Englishman to defend his country, remained the only army in England until the Civil War, about which we learned in Chapter 20. The king had a personal bodyguard of about one hundred Yeomen of the Guard, but that can hardly be described as an army. King Charles I spent much money on the navy, and spent it wisely and well. But when civil war broke out between him and Parliament, the navy sided with Parliament. That is one important reason why the King lost the Civil War.

The Civil War had a considerable influence on the growth of the army. There was a great deal of fighting between 1642 and 1649, and both King and Parliament needed an army. They both used the age-old system of the shire militia, for both King and Parliament claimed to be defending England against an attempt to alter the lawful government by force. Each side used the militia of the shires it controlled—roughly speaking, the King controlled the west and north of England at the beginning of the war, Parliament the much richer south and east, which included London. Parliament had much more money than the King to spend on raising and training an army, and so in the course of the war their army became much larger, better organized, and more strictly disciplined than the King's. It was so much better than any English army before this time that it was called the New Model Army.

By the end of the war in 1649 the Parliamentarian army had become a permanent professional army (which is called a 'standing army') and its generals, headed by Oliver Cromwell, were the real rulers of England. They were not popular with the people, because they had executed the King and because they forced on the

country a very strict and joyless kind of religion. So they kept a large standing army (about 80,000 men) to make the people obey their orders.

When Oliver Cromwell died and Parliament called Charles II back to his father's throne, nearly all Cromwell's army was disbanded. But one regiment (now the Coldstream Guards) was kept to form part of a small standing army. For weapons and methods of warfare were again becoming very complicated, and the English government did not feel that the militia, only called out in time of war, was sufficiently skilled or disciplined to defend England against a continental standing army. All the countries across the English Channel had standing armies—the nearest country, France, had an especially large one. So since the end of the 17th century England has never been without a standing army, and some of the best-known regiments in the army today can trace their origin directly to Charles II's standing army founded at the Restoration. They include, besides the Coldstream Guards, the Grenadier Guards and the Household Cavalry (the Life Guards and the Royal Horse Guards).

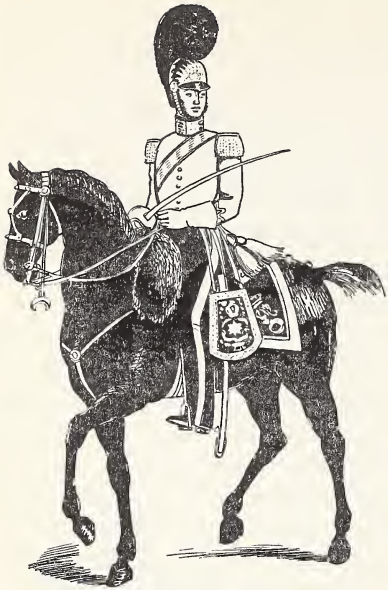
The decision to maintain a standing army faced Parliament with a very important and difficult problem. How was Parliament to retain control of the army and to prevent the king using it to make himself absolute master of the country, as Oliver Cromwell had been, and as the rulers of nearly all the countries on the continent of Europe were? This problem became acute in 1688, when James II gathered an army on Hounslow Heath, west of London, to force through his plan to make England a Roman Catholic country and himself an absolute ruler. After he had been driven from England (as related in Chapter 20) Parliament passed an act called the Mutiny Act (1689). The discipline of the army was based on this act, and the act was passed for only one year at a

time. So, if in any year Parliament failed to renew the Mutiny Act (now called the Army Act) military law would cease to exist. The soldiers could refuse to obey their officers, or could go home when they liked, and nobody could punish them for these breaches of discipline. In this way Parliament secured control of the standing army, for unless Parliament passed the Mutiny Act each year the army would just cease to exist. Parliament has another hold over the army. For if Parliament does not provide the money for the army each year (as described in Chapter 25), the officers and men could not be paid and would have to find some other way to earn their living.

Since there was in the 17th century no civil service to organize the standing army as there is today, the army had to be an almost completely self-contained and self-governing body. The army officers were the government's agents for raising, clothing, feeding, and generally running the army. Each officer had to buy his 'commission' (the document signed by the king which made him an officer). He could not be promoted to higher rank until a vacancy was caused by the promotion, death, or retirement of an officer of the higher rank. Then he had to buy his promotion by paying a large sum of money (the higher the rank the larger the sum) to the officer whom he was succeeding (or to his heirs). All the government did was to provide the money to pay the officers and men and to buy their uniforms and food; it also supplied arms and ammunition, especially



A grenadier of 1704 throwing a grenade



An officer of the dragoon guards

for the artillery. In this way the government secured a standing army at the least possible trouble and expense to itself.

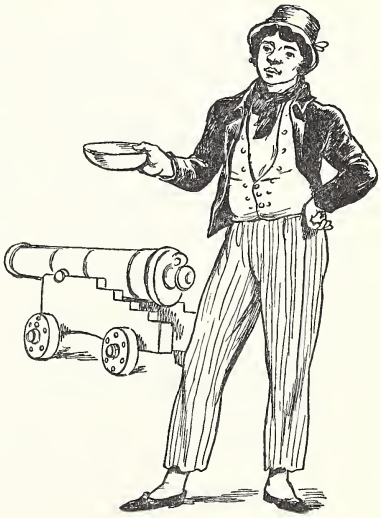
The profession of officer in the army was highly respected and keenly sought after by the younger sons of the nobility and by the landed gentry. A private income was necessary, because the pay was too low to provide the life an officer was expected to lead, and on top of that there was the heavy expense of buying promotion. But officers enjoyed a dignified position in society and just the kind of club and sporting life which gentlemen in 18th-century England liked best.

The condition of the ordinary soldiers was very miserable. No Englishman would enlist in the army if he could find any other way to make a living, and soldiers were looked down on and despised as men who could not do any better for themselves. The government, therefore, always had difficulty in securing enough recruits for the army in war-time. The British armies which fought in the wars of the 18th century (including the unsuccessful war to prevent the American colonies becoming independent) were largely made up of German soldiers hired from their rulers in Germany (where service in the armies was compulsory). The Duke of Wellington, one of the greatest of Britain's soldiers, said that his

army was recruited from 'the scum of the earth', though it is only fair to the soldiers with whom he fought his famous campaigns to remember that he went on to say 'it is really wonderful we should have made them the fine fellows they are'.

With soldiers recruited from 'the scum of the earth' in a brutal age, discipline was bound to be very strict. The slightest disobedience or dirtiness was punished by severe flogging on the bare back with a nine-thonged whip, called a 'cat-of-nine-tails'. The pain and humiliation of this punishment, which it was almost impossible to avoid, was one of the chief reasons why no respectable man would enlist in the army.

The navy developed on lines similar to those of the army, though because naval ships were much more valuable and complicated than any equipment used by the army, the government always controlled the navy much more directly. The navy began to provide a career for its officers which did not call for a private income about 200 years earlier than the army did. Commissions and promotion were not bought, but were earned by good service. Pensions were paid on retirement. As the navy needed many more ships, and officers and men to man them, in war than in peace, the system grew up of 'laying up' ships in reserve and sending the officers home on half-pay. If war broke out, the



A sailor of Nelson's time holding his grog bowl



The press gang

officers were recalled to active service (with full pay), the ships in reserve were officered and manned, and the fleet was thus brought up to its war strength.

The lot of the ordinary sailor was even harder and more brutal than that of the soldier. As a result, it was quite impossible to get enough volunteers, especially in war-time, to man the fleet. So the government fell back on its age-old right to compel every able-bodied Englishman to defend his country. 'Press gangs' of sailors led by officers were sent to the ports (and even sometimes to inland towns) to take by force as many able-bodied men as they needed to man their ships. Anyone might be taken at a moment's notice, even a bridegroom as he left the church with his bride on his arm. All protests were disregarded, and resistance earned a knock on the head which often kept the resister unconscious until he was safely on board. Because every ship needed a proportion of trained seamen, sailors were pressed from merchant ships, often as their ships were approaching an English port after a long foreign

voyage. Thus the wretched sailors, after the hardship of a long voyage, were not only forcibly transferred to the far harder and more brutal life of the Royal Navy, but were deprived, perhaps for years or even for ever, of the prospect of seeing their homes and families to which they had so eagerly looked forward as they approached England.

Discipline in the navy had to be very strict, because there were so many occasions at sea when the safety of a ship and all on board depended on instant obedience to orders, without regard to hardship or danger. For any slowness or slackness a sailor could be informally thrashed on the spot by his immediate superior. For more serious breaches of discipline he would be firmly tied to a grating and the skin flogged off his back with a cat-of-nine-tails before the eyes of the whole ship's company.

These were the armed forces which fought and saved England in the long wars against France and Napoleon (1793–1815), producing such great leaders as Nelson and Wellington and winning such famous victories as Trafalgar and Waterloo. This struggle for life brought the armed forces into much greater favour with the great mass of Englishmen. They were better organized, better equipped, and better looked after. For the first time the government built barracks to house the troops decently, instead of following the age-old custom of billeting them on public-houses and wherever else they could be thrust in. But in spite of these improvements, Britain remained too satisfied with her army and navy and was too anxious to economize, and consequently, in the middle of the 19th century, when she had to fight another war in Europe, her army was more hopelessly out of date and unprepared than in any other war in British history.

CHAPTER 29

THE ARMED FORCES OF TODAY

Our modern army really came into being in the middle of the 19th century, when events abroad forced the government to reform the system more thoroughly than it had ever been reformed before. The mismanagement and horrors of the Crimean War (1854–6) proved that the old system of an army run almost entirely by its officers with little care for the welfare of the soldiers was too inefficient and too cruel to be accepted by the British people in the second half of the 19th century. The victories of the magnificent new Prussian (German) army over Austria (1866) and France (1870–1) showed that the British army was a hundred years out of date compared, for example, with those of France and Germany.

The development of a professional civil service in England (as described in Chapter 22) enabled the government for the first time to manage the army itself, leaving to the officers only the training and leadership of their men in peace and war. During the Crimean War a Secretary of State for War was appointed to be responsible for the clothing, feeding, and general management of the army. In 1867 flogging was abolished, except in war-time. In 1871 Edward Cardwell, Secretary of State for War from 1868 to 1874 and the real founder of the modern British army, abolished the purchase of commissions in favour of the appointment and promotion of officers by seniority and merit.

He also made service in the army a respectable career and gave the army a basic organization which is still surviving. In place of enlistment for life he arranged for volunteers to serve for 12 years, of which 6 were spent with the colours (that is, on active service) and 6 on the reserve—that is, back in civil life, but liable to be recalled to the colours if required. This ensured that the army

consisted only of young and fit soldiers, and always had a reserve of fit, trained men ready for immediate recall in an emergency. Cardwell also based each regiment of the army in the district from which it was to draw its recruits, and did everything possible to make each district proud of its regiment and therefore proud to provide recruits for it. Each regiment was divided into two battalions, of which one was always overseas, the other at the regimental depot in England training recruits to keep up the strength of the battalion overseas.

Cardwell's organization worked very well during the last quarter of the 19th century, when Britain kept out of European quarrels and was busy developing and extending her Empire. But after 1900 Britain had to prepare to defend her immense possessions and wealth against the jealousy of her continental neighbours. The army had to be re-organized so that a powerful expeditionary force could be sent across the Channel at very short notice, and enough troops left in England to defend the island against invasion (in case the navy, the first line of defence, was outwitted or defeated). Lord Haldane, Secretary of State for War from 1905 to 1912, carried out this re-organization. He set up the Imperial General Staff, whose duty it was to think out the best method of fighting and to provide the latest weapons. He organized and trained the army at home as an expeditionary force of infantry and cavalry, with all the necessary supporting services—artillery, engineers, signals, hospitals, &c.—to make it a complete, self-contained army. For home defence he appealed to the age-old duty of every Englishman to train himself to defend his country, a duty which had been allowed to fall very much into the background during the peaceful 19th century, when there had been no wars beyond the capacity of the regular army. He established a Territorial Army, in which volunteers were trained in their spare time while England was at

peace. If war broke out, the Territorial Army would become a whole-time army to defend England when the expeditionary force went overseas.

This was the organization with which Britain entered the First World War in 1914. The British Expeditionary Force, which the German Emperor unwisely called 'a contemptible little army', played an important part in preventing the Germans defeating the French with their first overwhelming rush (as they succeeded in doing in 1940).

In the course of the 19th century the navy gradually exchanged wooden sailing battleships with muzzle-loading cannons, displacing about 2,000 tons (Nelson's flagship H.M.S. *Victory* is a perfect surviving example), for armoured steel battleships of about 15,000 tons, driven by steam and armed with breech-loading guns. Admiral Sir John Fisher, who became First Sea Lord of the Admiralty in 1904, was the first officer fully to realize what this revolution in sea warfare really meant. He insisted that the navy's technical officers, especially the engineers, were now just as important as the officers who commanded and fought the ships. Therefore they must all have the same training and enjoy the same authority and respect (which they had not done in the past). Highly skilled and intelligent sailors had to be attracted into the navy to work the complicated new guns and machinery. Conditions were greatly improved on a system similar to the army's: 7 years with the fleet, followed by 5 years in the Royal Fleet Reserve, provided a reserve of trained men to man the ships kept in reserve until the outbreak of war.

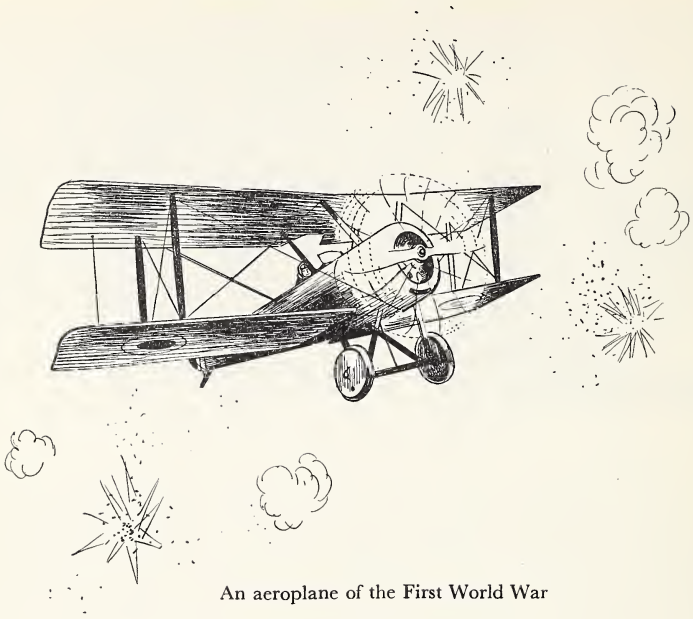
Admiral Fisher also made the navy's preparations for war much more realistic. Instead of keeping ships in places suitable for war with any European state, he recognized that the only state likely to fight Britain was Germany, and therefore stationed ships ready for



A midshipmen's mess in the 19th century

war with Germany only. He scrapped hundreds of old ships and started to build a new class of battleship (H.M.S. *Dreadnought* was the first) so large and fast, and so heavily armoured and gunned that they could blow any existing ship out of the water. So original was the design of the *Dreadnought* that every battleship built since has been basically similar, and ships of this class are known as 'Dreadnoughts'.

The army created by Cardwell and Haldane and the navy created by Fisher served Britain well in the First World War (1914–18), the greatest war the world had ever seen. Until 1916 Britain relied on volunteers to increase the size of the army and navy and to make good the army's heavy losses in the fighting in Flanders. By the end of 1915 three million men had joined the forces, and it had become clear that only compulsion would be fair to all and provide the numbers needed to win the war. So from 1916 onwards every able-bodied Englishman who was not



An aeroplane of the First World War

required for essential work at home was called up to serve in the armed forces. By the end of the war $6\frac{1}{4}$ million men had been enlisted, of whom 745,000 were killed.

The First World War was remarkable for the new weapons which it brought into use, the most important of which were tanks and aeroplanes. When the war started in 1914 aeroplanes were still in the experimental stage (the first powered flight—of 59 seconds—was made in 1903). But directly aeroplanes were proved to be of practical use—Bleriot crossed the English Channel from France in 1909—it was obvious that they would be very useful in war. At first the army and navy had their own air branches—the Royal

Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service. But by 1918 aeroplanes had become so important and so numerous that the R.F.C. and the R.N.A.S. were united to form a new branch of the armed forces—the Royal Air Force.

The R.A.F. was organized from the beginning in the way which experience with the army and the navy had already shown to be most efficient. At the head of each service is a member of the government—the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Secretary of State for War, and the Secretary of State for Air. Each of these ministers is chairman of a council composed of junior ministers and high-ranking officers and civil servants. These councils are called the Board of Admiralty, the Army Council, and the Air Council. The senior officer on each council is the minister's principal adviser on service matters. These officers are the First Sea Lord, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and the Chief of the Air Staff. Since early in the Second World War the three services have been represented in the Cabinet by a Minister of Defence. During the emergency of the war this office was held by the Prime Minister, but since 1947 there has been a separate Ministry of Defence.

After the First World War the British people, as they had done after the Napoleonic Wars, thought that the armed forces which had won the war were so efficient that there was no need for any improvement, and that therefore it was not necessary to spend much money or effort on defence. People also believed that Britain and her allies had fought the First World War to put an end to all such wars, and that, as they had won, there would never be another great war; so there was no need to prepare for one. Conscription was abolished and the money spent on defence severely reduced. The navy, and still more the army, took little trouble to understand the effect of new inventions and weapons on warfare. In the army

bad old traditions lingered on. In many regiments it was still impossible for an officer to live on his pay—he had to have a private income as well. In general, more interest was taken in horses than in tanks. Officers who preferred tanks were not promoted to important posts.

But many Germans had never accepted their defeat in 1918, and neither Russia, Italy, nor Japan was satisfied with what she had got out of the First World War. In 1933 the Nazi Party in Germany, led by Hitler, gained absolute power and was determined to avenge the German defeat. Hitler, by taking full advantage of the mistakes of Germany's enemies, started another war in 1939 even better prepared than the Germans had been in 1914. Poland and France were overwhelmed, and Britain was saved from like disaster only by the devotion and foresight of a very small number of men, especially in the R.A.F., who had provided radar and the best fighter aircraft in the world.

In April 1939, when it was clear to the British government that Hitler would start another war as soon as he was ready, conscription was re-introduced, thus reviving the age-old duty of every Englishman to prepare himself in peace-time to defend his country when called upon to do so. During the Second World War (1939–45) over $6\frac{1}{2}$ million men and (for the first time) women also were called up for service in the armed forces.

The international situation after the Second World War is so uncertain and the risk of further wars so great that Britain has realized that she must continue to bear a crushing burden of expense for keeping up the armed forces. All young men between the ages of 18 and 26 have continued to be called up for 2 years' service in the armed forces followed by $3\frac{1}{2}$ years on the reserve. In addition, the armed forces offer an honourable, interesting, and well-paid life to anyone who wishes to make them his career.

CHAPTER 30

THE BEGINNING OF CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES

MANY villagers in Billingham buy their groceries at a shop which is not quite like the other shops in the village. Over it there is the rather formidable inscription:

Billingham Branch No. 10. Ladyborough Mutual Co-operative Industrial Society.

Everyone calls it just the Co-op.

The word co-operate means 'work together', and that is the idea behind a co-op. A single person or a single family cannot do very much to alter the conditions under which we all live; but a thousand persons or a thousand families can do a great deal—much more than a thousand times as much as one.

Actually the idea of a co-operative society is a very old one. Several hundred years ago groups of sailors are known to have clubbed together to own their own ships, or groups of miners to join in owning their own mines. An Anglo-Saxon village itself was a little like a farmer's co-operative society—the land being organized in common, and all co-operating in working it. But the co-operative society as we know it nowadays dates back not to any of these very old plans but to some interesting experiments carried out in England towards the latter part of the 18th century.

About 150 years ago many working people in England, especially in the new industrial towns, often had a miserably low standard of living. The Industrial Revolution and the Agrarian Revolution had brought new methods both of manufacture and of farming, and these had caused, as new methods often do at first, widespread unemployment, poverty, and misery. Then things were made even

worse because England was involved in European wars. Wages were very low, food prices and taxes were very high. And there were hardly any public services, as there are today, to help people when misfortune overtook them.

One of the earliest attempts which a group of working-men made to improve their conditions took place in Birmingham in 1777. Here a number of tailors who were overworked and underpaid began to puzzle out the reason why they were so badly off. They came to the conclusion that much of the reason was that their employer was taking more than a fair profit on their work. They decided, therefore, to try to manage without any employer. They clubbed together to hire a workshop in which they could employ themselves. The clothes they made they tried to sell directly to the people who wanted clothes, instead of selling them to a shopkeeper, who, of course, would want a profit on them. They found that in this way it was possible for the men to have better wages and shorter hours, and at the same time for the customers to have cheaper clothes. Everyone was better off (except, of course, the employer and shopkeeper, who were no longer making a profit on their work).

Another experiment of a rather different kind was made with a corn-mill in Hull in 1795. Everyone had been accustomed for years to take his corn to the manor mill and to pay whatever charge was made, because there was no other way of getting the corn ground. Then the people of Hull clubbed together and established, among other things, a mill which they called the Anti-Mill, because it was set up in competition to the manorial mill. At this mill they could grind their corn much more cheaply, and so they could have cheaper bread.

There were some other early co-operative ventures about the same time. Many of them proved successful at first, but none of

them lasted long. These early societies had many difficult problems to meet. One of their most serious difficulties was that there were not enough people who knew how to run a business. Many co-operative workshops failed because of lack of honesty in their managers; many others failed because they had not enough capital to tide them over bad periods. Nearly all began with a great burst of enthusiasm—their founders were going to turn the world upside down in a year or two. But their enthusiasm soon vanished in face of difficulties, and the societies gradually faded away. In 1830 there had been about 300 little co-operative societies, but by 1877 only four of these were left.

These early societies were all mainly concerned with producing goods. The first co-operative societies to succeed were those concerned with distributing goods. To this day there are a great many more co-operative shops offering goods for sale than there are co-operative workshops in which the men employed in the workshop actually own their own tools and machinery, appoint their own manager, and share out at least a part of the profits among those who have made the goods. Actually, there are about fifty-three such 'Co-partnership Societies', mostly making boots or clothes or doing printing. Their total trade is only about £6½ million, compared with a total Co-operative trade of nearly £800 million a year.

Co-operation's first great success, then, was to be in distributing goods rather than in producing them. The first modern co-operative society in the world was started in 1844 at Rochdale in Lancashire. Its members called themselves the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers. They realized that the earlier societies would not have failed if there had not been something wrong with their planning; and they had the sense to see where the other co-ops. had gone wrong, and to profit by other people's mistakes. They decided from the beginning that they would allow no credit.



The Rochdale Pioneers' shop

Everything taken from their shop had to be paid for in cash. They arranged that they would set aside some of their profits so that in time they might establish their own workshops and factories, and so be able to make their own goods as well as sell them. They agreed that their society should be tied to no church or chapel, and to no political party. They decided that they would set aside $\frac{1}{40}$ of all their profits to carry out educational work among their members.

They agreed that they would not try to undersell the other shopkeepers, but the goods in their shop should be sold at the ordinary market prices. Then at the end of the year all the profit not earmarked for other purposes should go to the people who had bought the goods, in the same proportion as their purchases. That is, a

man who had bought say £20 worth of goods would have just twice as big a share of the profits as one who had bought only £10 worth. They also arranged that people who wanted to save money might leave their share of profit with the society for the society to use as 'capital' in the business, and that such savings would earn 'interest' at the rate of 5% per year. In this way the society would also serve as a kind of bank, helping quite poor people gradually to save a little nest egg of money.

After the 'Hungry Forties', the years after 1840 when the harvests were bad and poor people found the times very hard, the engineers in Ladyborough, as well as in many other places in England, decided to set up their co-op.—the L.M.C.I.S.—and they looked to the Rochdale experiment to see how best to do it. From the beginning it was a great success, and now it employs hundreds of men and women, and it has half a million pounds of share capital, and something like 20,000 members. Not all its members are in Ladyborough, for it has spread into the countryside for many miles round the town. It soon began to take over several of the little village co-ops., including that at Billingham, which had found it hard to remain in business in competition with the big shops in the town. That is how it comes to have a branch in Billingham. Four times a year the Billingham co-operators go over to Ladyborough to attend the quarterly meetings of the L.M.C.I.S., and thus to take part in the government of their co-op. society.

CHAPTER 31

HOW A CO-OP. WORKS

THE working of a modern co-operative society, wherever it is, is in many respects much like that of the Rochdale Pioneers, though each society may have some minor differences from the others. It is usually possible to obtain a copy of the rules of a local society for sixpence, and to get a copy of its last report and balance sheet for nothing, by asking at the nearest co-op. From these it should be possible to find out how to become a member, and just how the local society is run.

It is not usually possible to be a full member of a co-operative society until you own perhaps a £5, perhaps a £1 share. This you may get either by paying outright for it, or by allowing the dividend on what you buy in the shop to accumulate until it has paid for the share. On becoming a member you are given a number, which is your share number, and which is the number you must quote whenever you buy anything, so as to ensure that the dividend on your purchase is credited to you.

The government of a society is in the hands of two separate bodies, a president and committee elected annually, and a quarterly (or sometimes an annual) meeting, to which all members have the right to come. The president and committee, who are usually elected at the quarterly meetings, manage the society as they think best, but they have to answer for all that they do to the quarterly meeting. There is this important difference between a co-operative society meeting and the annual shareholders' meeting of an ordinary company: in a co-operative society, however many shares you have, you can have only one vote; in an ordinary company, on the other hand, you have as many votes as you have shares—the man with 200 shares having 200 times as many votes as

the man with one. In the co-operative society's quarterly meeting everyone present may speak, and everyone may vote upon all the business done. (We might say, perhaps, that the quarterly meeting is a little like the old English folk moot, and also much like a modern parish meeting.)

At this meeting the committee suggest, among other things, what dividend shall be paid; but nothing can be done until the members at the meeting have agreed. This meeting also selects what members it shall send to represent the society at all sorts of conferences and boards which deal with the national affairs of the co-operative movement. In some ways we might say that the committee is like a kind of Cabinet, with the president as Prime Minister, and the quarterly meeting is like the House of Commons. The main difference is that the Cabinet has to resign if the House of Commons does not agree with its policy, while the quarterly meeting cannot dismiss the whole committee at once; it can only refuse to re-elect them one or two at a time—which in the end amounts to much the same thing.

At the quarterly meeting the education committee brings forward its report to show how it has spent the money allotted by the society to educational work. A modern society spends $\frac{1}{40}$ (more or less) of its profits on education, just as the Rochdale Pioneers did. The education committee may spend much money in running classes and summer schools. All the co-op. societies have clubbed together to set up the Co-operative College in Leicestershire, where students may work up to university standard. Many societies give scholarships from their educational funds to enable their members to spend periods of study there, or at other colleges. Years ago, before there were so many public libraries as there are now, many societies established libraries for their members. Most societies nowadays organize guilds of one sort or another for their members,

and others for their members' children. Many have choirs, debating societies, tennis and other sports' clubs, and so on.

The retail societies have also formed a great wholesale society (the Co-operative Wholesale Society), from which they buy most of their goods. The retail societies are members of the wholesale society, just as the individual is a member of his retail society; and, like the individual member, each draws a dividend from the wholesale society in proportion to its purchases. So the Co-operative Societies do a great deal more than just selling groceries and other goods to their members.

In all the problems of managing a co-op., the committee and the quarterly meeting have the last word. Therefore, since the quarterly meeting is so powerful, it is clearly important that all the members who have a right to be there should attend and take active part in the management of their society. A great many members do nothing of the sort. This spoils the main purpose of a co-op.—that it should be a society in which all its members take a share both in deciding on its policy and in benefiting from its work.

CHAPTER 32

HOW TRADE UNIONS HAVE GROWN UP

THE railway porter at Billingham Station wears in his coat lapel a little badge saying N.U.R. The booking clerk there has one with the letters T.S.S.A. The engine drivers and stokers wear a rather similar badge, but theirs say A.S.L.E.F. Most of the drivers and conductors on the buses through the village belong to a society called T. & G.W.U. In the last few years the shop assistants in the Billingham Co-op and other shops have also begun to wear a badge—that of U.S.D.A.W. And now the farm workers in Billingham and its neighbouring villages have also begun to go to work on the farms wearing a badge saying T. & G.W.U. or N.U.A.W.

The badges are those of various trade unions, and the letters stand for the names of the unions, various National or Associated Unions or Societies or Associations. The T. & G.W.U., for example, stands for the Transport and General Workers Union. This is the largest individual union in Britain, and, indeed, in the world, and has a membership of over $1\frac{1}{4}$ millions.

Perhaps your father or some other relation wears a trade-union badge or carries a union card. Very possibly your teachers belong to the N.U.T. (National Union of Teachers). It would be interesting to find out from them all something about their union and its rules and activities. Perhaps the best way to understand a little about trade unions is to go back into their history and see how and why they grew up. Then we can see how they are organized today and what they are now trying to do.

The principal purpose of trade unions is to give the wage-earners the advantage of united bargaining to enable them to insist on fair wages and reasonable conditions of work. As we have already seen in the co-operatives, when many people act together

they can be very much more powerful than any single person can be acting by himself. For example, if there are ten men wanting a job and only two jobs, the employer can give the jobs to those willing to work for the lowest wage, and so wages fall. But if the ten men, and perhaps many others as well, agree together that no one of them will accept the job for less than the fair wage, then the employer cannot get anyone to work for him except at a fair wage.

In the middle ages wages and conditions of work were largely controlled by the craft guilds (about which we read in Chapter 18 of Book 2 in this series). In the 14th century, however, after the terrible Black Death had swept away about a third of the working people of England, labourers were scarce, and those there were began to demand higher wages. The control of the guilds was beginning to break down, and the government tried to check the rise in wages by passing laws called the Statutes of Labourers; but it was difficult to make such laws effective. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth I the government took over altogether the control of wages and conditions of work, and the justices of the peace were made responsible for fixing the wage-rates for the various trades in their district.

During the 18th century, when the belief in free competition was growing very strong, most people thought that free bargaining was the right way to settle wages, and that anything which interfered with this was dangerous. The local justices, though they continued to carry out their duty of fixing wages, fixed only a maximum wage, and employers could pay as much less as they could make the workers accept. In open competition, however, wage-earners, dependent upon earning each week enough to keep themselves and their families, cannot compete fairly with employers, who can more often afford to wait. An employer may lose a lot of money by

letting his factory machines stand idle for a week, but he will not starve; and it may pay him in the long run if in that way he can get workers for a lower wage. The workman, on the other hand, knows that if he refuses the job he will have no money to buy food and pay his rent, and so he dare not refuse. During most of the 18th century trade was expanding and there were plenty of jobs; so the free-competition method worked fairly well. But in the 19th century, when machines were being introduced to do work instead of men, there were often more labourers than jobs, and workers often had to accept jobs at starvation wages.

During short periods of bad trade in the 18th century, certain workmen were beginning to realize that they would do better if they combined. Small unofficial unions of workers began to appear, and some of these began to use the weapon of the strike to obtain fair treatment. As early as 1721 the government, frightened that the workers would get too powerful and that the balance of trade would be upset, began to pass Combination Acts to put down these early unions.

At the end of the 18th century the experience of the French Revolution made governments everywhere afraid that any societies of workers were likely to be revolutionary, so they must be crushed. In England all forms of workers' associations were declared illegal and suppressed. However, in 1824 these laws were repealed, largely as the result of 10 years of persistent work by Francis Place, though it still remained illegal to form criminal societies or to administer oaths in secret.

During the next 10 years, years of general prosperity and good employment, the trade union movement made steady but unspectacular progress. In 1834 an incident took place which won the movement a good deal of public sympathy. A group of farmworkers at Tolpuddle in Dorset banded themselves together into a

sort of union which they called a Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers. Probably through ignorance of the law, they swore an oath of loyalty to their society. They were brought to law as though they were a criminal association, and at the Dorchester Assizes six of their leaders were sentenced to transportation for taking illegal oaths. This harsh act roused a great deal of indignation, and the six Dorset labourers, who became known as the Tolpuddle Martyrs, were pardoned 2 years later.

In the next 20 or 30 years trade unionism developed fast. In 1841 the miners of England and Ireland formed an Association, and in 1851 the important Amalgamated Society of Engineers was founded. This union (now A.E.U.) one of the largest, started the new principle that associated crafts which shared the same general activities—such as fitters, pattern-makers, machinists, and blacksmiths—should amalgamate into one large and powerful union with various branches. In 1861 the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners was formed, followed by other unions of Boot and Shoe Makers, Bricklayers, and others. All these unions elected a committee to act for the common cause of trade unions.

The next task for the movement was to gain legal recognition from the government. These early trade unions, though since 1824 no longer considered illegal, were not legally recognized and could claim no protection from the law. If, for example, a trade-union official ran away with trade-union funds, the union could not take legal action against him. In 1868 all the principal unions sent delegates to a conference at Manchester to discuss their legal position. This conference we might call the first Trades Union Congress. So powerful was the organization that in 1871 an Act was passed in Parliament giving trade unions legal recognition and protection, and recognizing that when a union called a strike, it was not conspiring against the security of the state.

HOW TRADE UNIONS HAVE GROWN UP

In the early years of the 20th century, after the foundation of the Labour Party, there was much dispute as to how far trade unions might take part in politics—whether, for example, they might use their funds to finance members of Parliament or to support a political party. These disputes were brought to a head by the general strike of 1926. General strikes had often been used in other countries to force the hand of the government, but in England this was considered an illegal action. The general strike was an attempt by all the great industrial and transport unions to use the strike weapon to force the government to intervene in a mining dispute where the union and the employers were not able to reach an agreement. The strike failed after 9 days because public opinion was against it, and because volunteers kept essential services going as long as was necessary.

For a period the political activities of trade unions were again restricted, but since 1945 they have been entirely free, not only to press for improvements in wages and working conditions but also to take part in politics.

CHAPTER 33

TRADE UNIONS TODAY

Of the 18 million or more working people of Great Britain some 6 millions are members of trade unions. There are about 200 main trade unions, as well as very many smaller ones. All trade-union members pay a small weekly subscription, and this forms the union funds.

It is the duty of the union to look after the interests of its members and to represent them in dealing with employers or the government. If in disputes with employers no settlement can be reached by negotiation, then the union may call on the members to strike—that is, to do no work at all until a settlement is reached. During a strike the union pays the workers 'strike pay' from union funds, as long as these last. A workman who does not come out on strike when called by his union is looked on by his workmates as a traitor and is called a 'blackleg'.

Union members have the right to 'picket' the works during a strike in order to persuade any men who do come to work to go home again. The pickets, however, may not use force to prevent men from going to work, and if their persuasions become violent, they may be severely punished.

It sometimes happens in trades where men and employers are not on good terms that, instead of the union declaring a strike for more wages or better conditions, the employers may declare a 'lock-out' for lower wages or higher output of work. In this case the employer locks the doors of the works and refuses to let the men work or earn wages until they accept his terms. Then the union pays 'lock-out pay'.

A great deal is now done to remove the need for strike or lock-out action. It was a long time before the employers in many trades



Strikers marching to a meeting, carrying a trade-union banner

would recognize the right of the unions to represent the workers and would meet them to try to find a means of settlement. It was not until 1914, for example, that the railway companies would recognize the right of the three great railway unions to speak for their men. In the early days of trade unions some employers used to make it a condition of employment that the worker should sign a promise that he would not join a union. Now, however, most good employers see the advantage of dealing with a body that can speak on behalf of all their men, and they encourage their employees to join the union. Sometimes they even agree to make membership of the union a condition of employment. A factory or works with this condition, especially in America, is called a 'closed shop'. Nearly all the thousands of co-operative shops and factories are closed shops, and in many other trades and industries there is also very strong pressure to join the union.

Not only, therefore, are employers and workers on better terms

than they were, but also rates of wages are much more standardized. Wage-rates are now usually fixed for a whole industry by a joint board or committee made up of representatives of employers and workers with an independent chairman either chosen by the board or appointed by the government. These boards are called Whitley Councils because J. H. Whitley, then Speaker of the House of Commons, was mainly responsible for establishing them.

A dispute may arise between unions and employers when an employer wishes to change from time rate of wages (which many workmen prefer) to piece-work (which most employers prefer). By discussion, however, between employers and union representatives a compromise may be reached. For example, it may be decided to pay piece-work rates with the guarantee of a minimum wage. Sometimes the unions win for their members important concessions, such as a share in profits, or the adoption of a pensions scheme, or holidays with pay.

The value of a trade union to workers is not only a matter of winning for them higher wages, and certainly not only to organize strikes. There are some unions which have never had a single strike; and one important union has not even a strike fund. Far more important than this, is the unions' concern with watching working conditions and taking action to prevent developments which will fall hardly on the workers. For example, in an industry where machines are being introduced which will displace men, the union will insist either that the machines are introduced so gradually that the men can be absorbed or that some other suitable work shall be arranged for the men. A wise union will never oppose the introduction of improved methods which will lower costs of production, for these are good for trade, and in the long run the worker as well as employers reap the benefit of prosperous trade.

Unions have from the beginning acted to some extent as

friendly societies. They use their funds not only to pay out-of-work benefit, but also to help their members in cases of accident or illness. Some run convalescent and holiday homes; some have pension schemes for old workmen; others insure men in dangerous trades; or in trades involving the use of expensive tools they may insure the tools. Most unions provide legal aid for members needing it—for example in seeking compensation for injury arising from their work; and many pay fees for further education for members and offer scholarships for higher education or advanced technical training.

Unions, therefore, are beneficial to workers in many ways; indeed, without them workers might never have reached the high standard of living and comparative security enjoyed in Britain today. But, if trade unions are to do their part well they must have the loyalty of their members. It is their function to obtain fair terms for workers, and to obtain these, if possible, by negotiation, not by strikes. Though in the past strikes have too often been the only way of obtaining for labour a fair share, they are obviously wasteful and crippling to trade. Wise unions know that to make unreasonable demands will in the long run harm workers, as well as employers. They have to judge, therefore, whether the workers have a reasonable cause for complaint or not. On some occasions workers in an industry have insisted on striking against the advice of their unions. Such unsupported strikes do much harm to the cause of labour and undermine the whole purpose of trades unions.

CHAPTER 34

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND THE FREE CHURCHES

When Leofric first became priest of Billingham in the 9th century, the Church in England was part of the same great 'Catholic' Church which spread all over western Europe and which looked to the Pope in Rome as its earthly head. When William the Conqueror and the Normans conquered England, they belonged to the same Catholic Church. In the middle ages the Church grew very rich and powerful. Not only was most teaching both in universities and schools carried out by the Church, but also most of the king's chief advisers were men holding high positions in the Church. For a long time the bishops in England were appointed, not by the king, but by the Pope; and he sometimes sent foreigners to hold important positions in the Church in England.

The bishops and also the rich monasteries and priories, such as the Priory of Our Lady in the Meadows, came to own more and more land, and in many cases they grew to be more interested in their wealth and political power than in their duties as God's ministers. Among Chaucer's company of pilgrims going to Canterbury was a wealthy abbot, and Chaucer says, 'He was a lord full fat and in good point' and that 'Greyhounds he hadde, as swift as fowel in flight', and that 'no cost wolde he spare'.

When the strong Tudor kings, Henry VII and Henry VIII, came to the throne, they thought the bishops and abbots were too powerful, and they disliked any of their subjects owing allegiance to an outside power such as the Pope. Many English people did not like to be ruled in any matter by a foreign authority—the Pope in Rome. So when Henry VIII quarrelled with the Pope because he wanted to divorce his wife Catherine, the people of England

were willing to follow him. In 1534 Henry declared that he and not the Pope was head of the Church in England. This is called the Act of Supremacy, and is the beginning of the Church of England as separate from the Roman Catholic Church. It was not so much a change of faith as a change of organization—a nationalist rather than a religious move.

There were soon, however, some changes in the church services. First an English translation of the Bible was used in church. Then in 1549 the first English Prayer Book was issued, and this directed that the services should be said in English instead of Latin, as well as making other small changes. The Prayer Book was revised again in Tudor times, and the services moved a little further from the old services of the medieval Church.

There were groups of people who wanted the English Church to move much further away from the Roman Church, and the services to become much simpler, with more emphasis on preaching the doctrine of the Bible and less on sacraments and set forms of worship. These 'puritans' would not conform to the orthodox Church, and that is why they came to be called 'Nonconformists'.

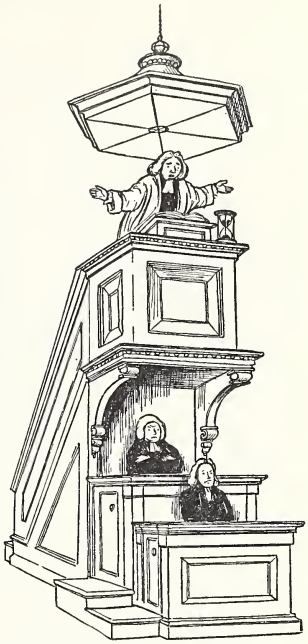
This was a time when people were very intolerant of beliefs which were not their own, and those who would not conform to the official religion of a country were often cruelly persecuted. The Roman Catholic Church, especially in Spain, had instituted the terrible Inquisition in order to force people to accept the Roman faith; it tortured and burnt at the stake those who had different religious beliefs. People really believed that by burning heretics to death they were saving them from Hell fire and were doing the will of God. Even in England Mary Tudor burnt at the stake some 300 Protestants, and in Elizabeth I's reign about 200 Roman Catholics lost their lives when England was at war with the most powerful Roman Catholic state—Spain.

During the 17th century the Nonconformist movement grew in England. In 1608 a party of Nonconformists left England for Holland. Twelve years later they were joined by others from England and they went to settle in a new land in the recently discovered continent of America, where they might worship as they wished. There these Pilgrim Fathers founded the colony of New England in 1620. Later, a band of Quakers went to Pennsylvania, also in America. In the Civil War the Nonconformists rebelled against the king and won for themselves the right to govern England for a time (the Commonwealth, 1649–60).

When Charles II was restored to his throne, an attempt was again made to force the puritans to conform to the Church of England. But in 1689, after the Glorious Revolution, a Toleration Act was passed, which for the first time accepted the idea that people should be free to follow what faith they wished and to worship as they chose, so long as they were not Roman Catholics. In many places chapels began to appear where people met together under their chosen minister. They held services which had no set pattern, as the services in the Church of England had, and the central feature of which was the sermon.

By the beginning of the 18th century there would have been a Nonconformist chapel in Linford, and also probably one in Wandsley. During the early years of the 18th century some of the people in Billingham may have taken to going over to Wandsley on Sunday evenings to attend the chapel there, instead of going to their own church. The vicar of Billingham, though he was a kindly man, a good scholar, and looked up to by his parishioners, was in many ways more of a country gentleman than a priest. He lived a pleasant country life in his beautiful red-brick vicarage, built for his predecessor by the then squire. He went hunting and shooting with the squire, and he spent his evenings in

his library reading and writing, or dining and drinking port with the squire. He conducted dignified services in his church on Sunday mornings and evenings, preaching scholarly sermons which meant very little to most of his congregation. He sometimes rebuked those villagers whom he had heard were going to the chapel at Wandsley; but he did little to find out why they preferred to go. Sometimes he was away from his parish for long periods when he went to the Continent with the squire's son. During those times he would leave a curate to do his work. Many parishes all over England had rectors or vicars like the vicar of Billingham, who lived easy, rather lazy, selfish lives, and did not bother themselves very much so long as nothing happened to change the peaceful life they enjoyed. Often they did not even live in their parishes, but rode over once a week to take services.



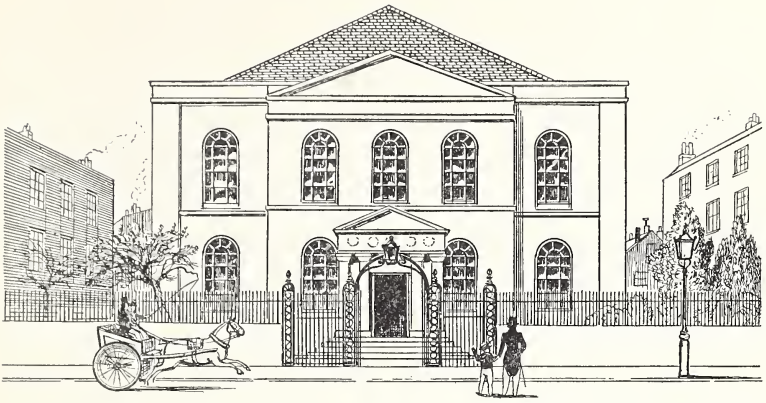
A clergyman of the 18th century in his pulpit

Meanwhile at Oxford two young men, John and Charles Wesley, the sons of a Lincolnshire parson, were gathering together a band of serious young men who were called by their fellows 'methodists' because they ordered their lives by a strict rule. These young men, especially John Wesley, were to start a great religious revival in England. In about 1738, when he was thirty-five years old, John Wesley began his preaching mission all over England. Wherever he went he left behind small but well-organized bands

of earnest lay-preachers to carry on his work. They also went everywhere preaching, generally in the open air, in towns and villages. Wesley had no wish to work outside the Church, but unfortunately many clergymen, such as the vicar of Billingham, were frightened of his methods and would not work with him. Finally, in 1784, Wesley began ordaining ministers of his own; and after his death his followers broke away from the Church of England, and by 1836 they had established their own free Methodist Church.

By the 19th century, therefore, a town such as Wandsley, which was a growing industrial town, had several kinds of churches or chapels. There was the parish church of the Established Church of England. There was also a small Roman Catholic church which had been opened soon after the Roman Catholics were allowed to worship in public again in 1791. There was a Nonconformist Congregational chapel, started during the Civil Wars, which had flourished since the Toleration Act in 1689; and now there was a growing community of Wesley's Methodist followers who had built their own chapel, towards the end of the 18th century. There was also later a centre of the Salvation Army, a movement started in 1878 by one of Wesley's followers, William Booth, to work particularly in poor industrial areas. Not only in the towns but also in most of the villages there was usually either a Congregational or Baptist chapel or a Methodist one, as well as the parish church. A fair-sized village might have as many as three or even four places of worship, in addition to its ancient parish church.

During the 19th century, reform movements began within the Church of England also, influenced by the fervour of the free churches. These were of two kinds. One branch of churchmen, much influenced by the Nonconformist ideals and reforms, started an Evangelical movement to which belonged many of the great



An 18th-century Nonconformist chapel

social reformers of the 19th century. One of the founders of this movement was Charles Simeon of Cambridge, whose work began in the 1780s. Then in the 1830s a group of Oxford men, led by Newman, Pusey, and Keble, began a movement known as the Oxford Movement, which aimed at reminding people that the English Church was a true part of the Catholic Church, above kings and states. They tried to bring back the importance of the sacraments, especially of Holy Communion, and to emphasize worship as more important than sermons.

Both these great movements believed, as did Wesley, in the importance of missionary work. The Evangelicals worked through the Church Missionary Society, and the Anglo-Catholics, as the Oxford reformers were called, worked through the oldest missionary society, founded in 1701—the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

Today the work of all these great movements continues. At

Billingham the present vicar, who is an Oxford man, tries to bring the services in his church nearer to the kind of services which were being held there at the time of the Reformation. At Ladyborough, too, the Oxford Movement has left most influence. At Wandsley, however, though there is an Anglo-Catholic (or high) church, the majority of the people prefer the Evangelical parish church or one of the Free Churches. Today, however, people are realizing more and more that all these churches are part of the great fellowship of Christianity, and are looking not so much for differences as for the great common ground of belief which all of them share.

CHAPTER 35

CONCLUSION

In this book we have described most of the important institutions of government, both local and central, and also some of the other important institutions which have gone to make Britain what she is today. We have tried to show how in Britain almost all these institutions have their roots in the past—often in the very distant past. The constitution of this country and the laws which govern us were not framed at one great law-making time (as the constitution of the United States of America was framed). They are not contained in any one great document, as is, for example, the constitution of India, compiled in 1951. They have grown up gradually through the centuries, based on long-standing custom, on laws passed to meet particular needs, and on the interpretation of these laws in the law-courts.

This gradual growth has been possible because Great Britain, more than almost any European country, has had a continuous history, unbroken for centuries either by invasions of foreign conquerors or by the devastations of internal revolutions. Changes have therefore taken place slowly. The rule of a powerful monarchy with a small council of advisers has changed into the rule of a freely elected Parliament and a limited monarchy so gradually that no one can say exactly when one became the other. There are great landmarks such as Magna Carta in 1215, the Bill of Rights in 1689, and the Reform Act of 1832, when important steps forward have been taken. But even these important acts were not so much laying down new laws as establishing by law a state of affairs already reached. Changes are still taking place, and can always take place so long as the will of the people is behind them. This ability to make changes, great or small, to meet new circumstances

is one of the features of British institutions which has helped to ward off the violent revolutions with which many European countries have had to reshape their governments.

The British genius for government has had a world-wide effect, for British people have carried their institutions to all the countries which at one time or another have been under the British flag. The governments of all these countries have been to some extent modelled on the institutions of government of the mother country. The great Dominions now all have their own independent governments, but all have inherited certain ideas of democracy and freedom which have come to them, as to Britain, from institutions shaped by trial and error in the long history of the British people.

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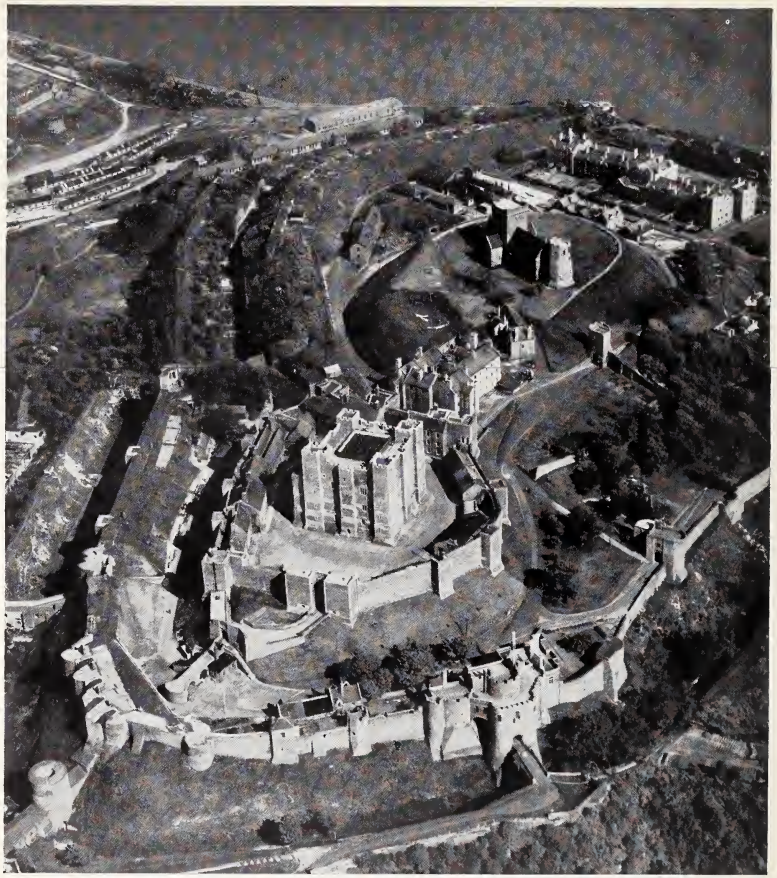
Left: THE RUTHWELL CROSS, 7TH CENTURY

In the 7th and 8th centuries Northumbria was the most important religious centre in England. Carved crosses were set up, round which the people gathered to hear the priests preach

Right: ILLUMINATION FROM THE CHARTER GIVEN BY KING EDGAR IN 966 TO THE NEW MINSTER, WINCHESTER

In the 10th century, after Alfred the Great had established his capital at Winchester, many works of art were produced there. This painting shows King Edgar, flanked by Saints, offering the Charter of the monastery to Christ

PLATE 2



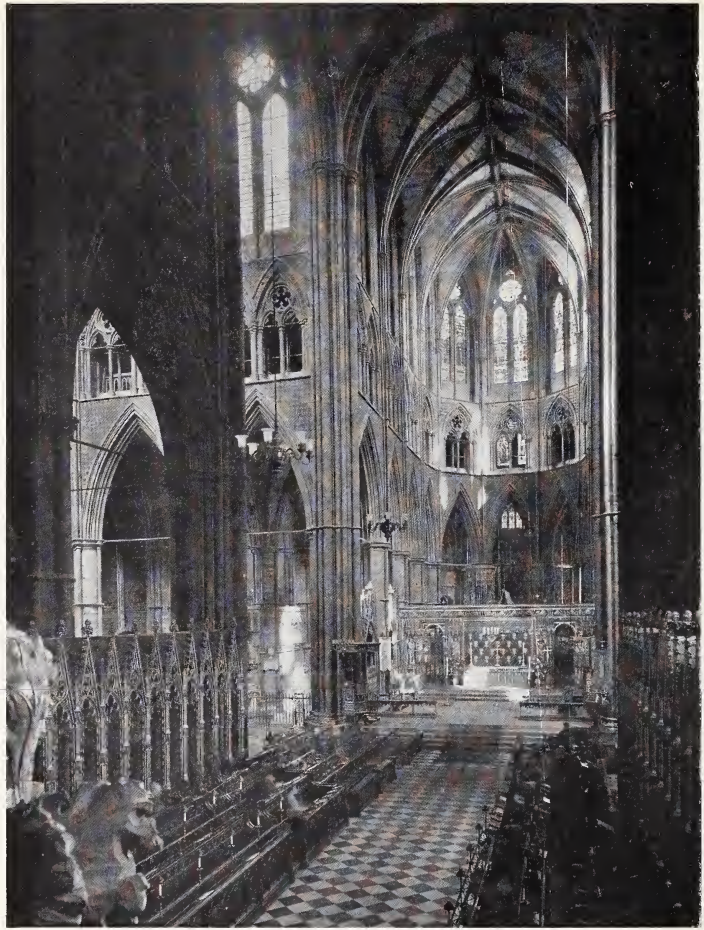
AERIAL VIEW OF DOVER CASTLE FROM THE NORTH WEST

One of the few fortified sites in Britain which has been in continuous use from Roman times to the present day—nearly two thousand years. Notice especially the Roman lighthouse (at the west end of the church) and the great Norman keep. The walls and towers around the keep are also Norman. The keep and the walls around it show the kind of castle Count Geoffrey would have built near Linford



A BISHOP AND SOLDIER. FIGURES ON THE FAÇADE OF WELLS CATHEDRAL, EARLY 13TH CENTURY

The figures represent saints, and the Bishop holds the cut-off top of his head to show how he was martyred. The soldier is wearing the armour of a Crusader

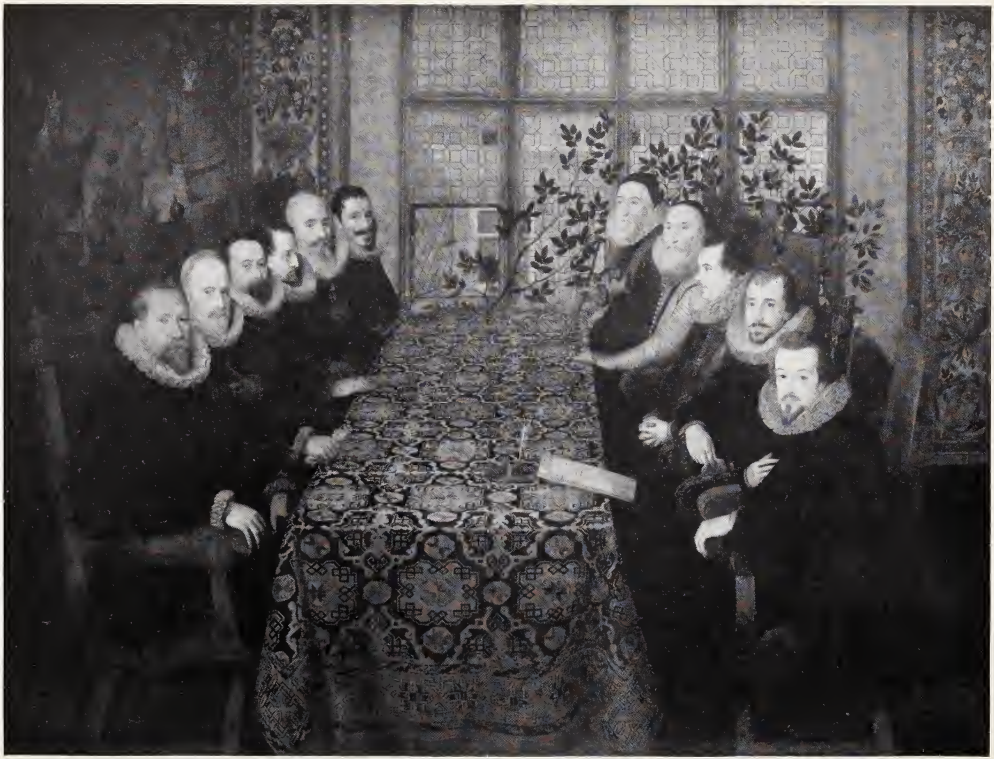


INTERIOR OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY

The first Abbey church was built by Edward the Confessor, but in the 13th century it was rebuilt under Henry III. It was planned as the Coronation church with an especially large space for the ceremony. Behind the altar is the shrine of King Edward and the royal tombs

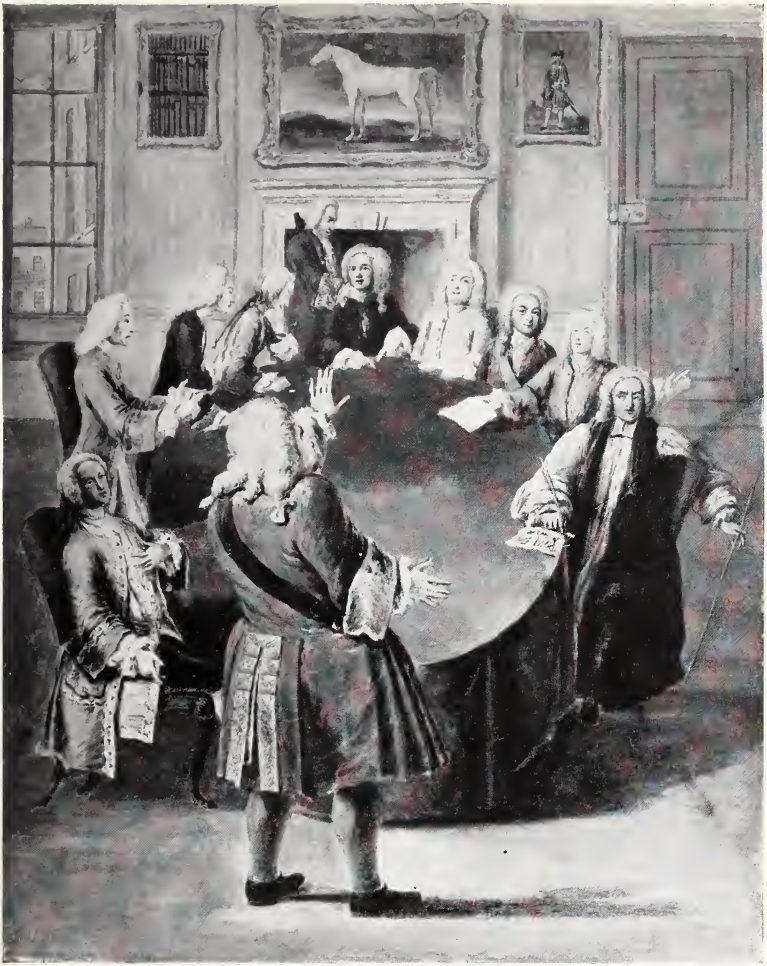


RICHARD II IN CORONATION ROBES,
SEATED ON THE CORONATION CHAIR



THE SOMERSET HOUSE CONFERENCE, 1604

At this conference English, Spanish, and Austrian plenipotentiaries concluded a treaty of peace and commerce between the Kings of Great Britain and Spain and the Archdukes of Austria



SIR ROBERT WALPOLE ADDRESSING THE CABINET

It is not known what precise incident is depicted, but feelings are evidently running high



DAVENANT SCHOOL, WHITECHAPEL, FOUNDED IN 1680

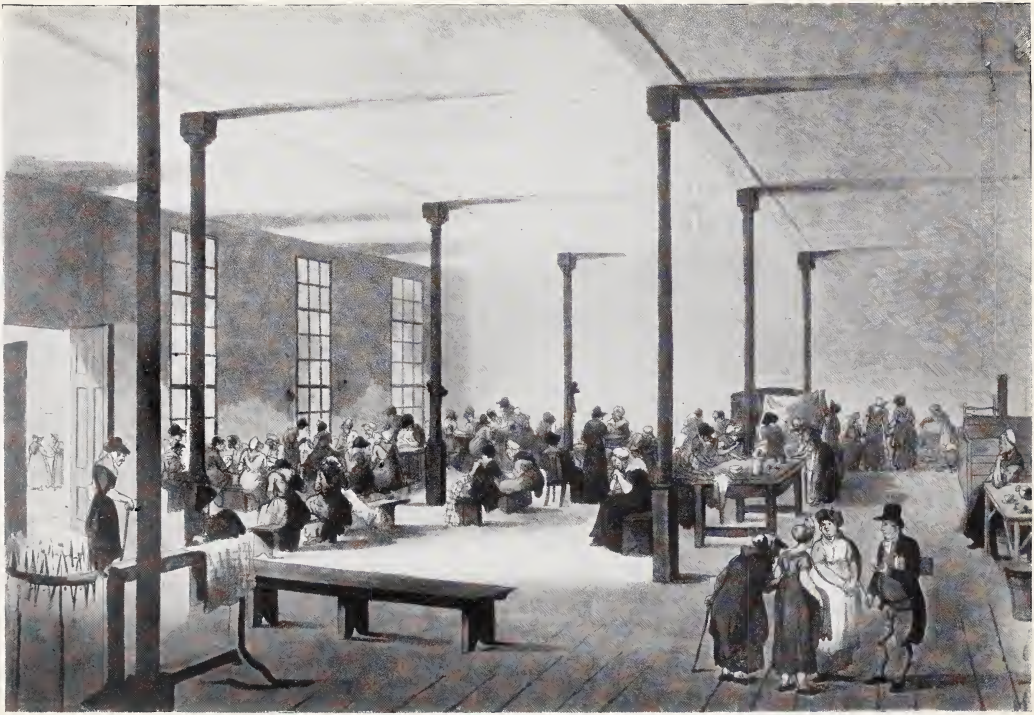
This school, like the Billingham school, was founded by the rector of the parish, whose statue stands above the door



THE LORD MAYOR OF LONDON, COURT OF ALDERMEN, AND COMMON COUNCIL, 1750

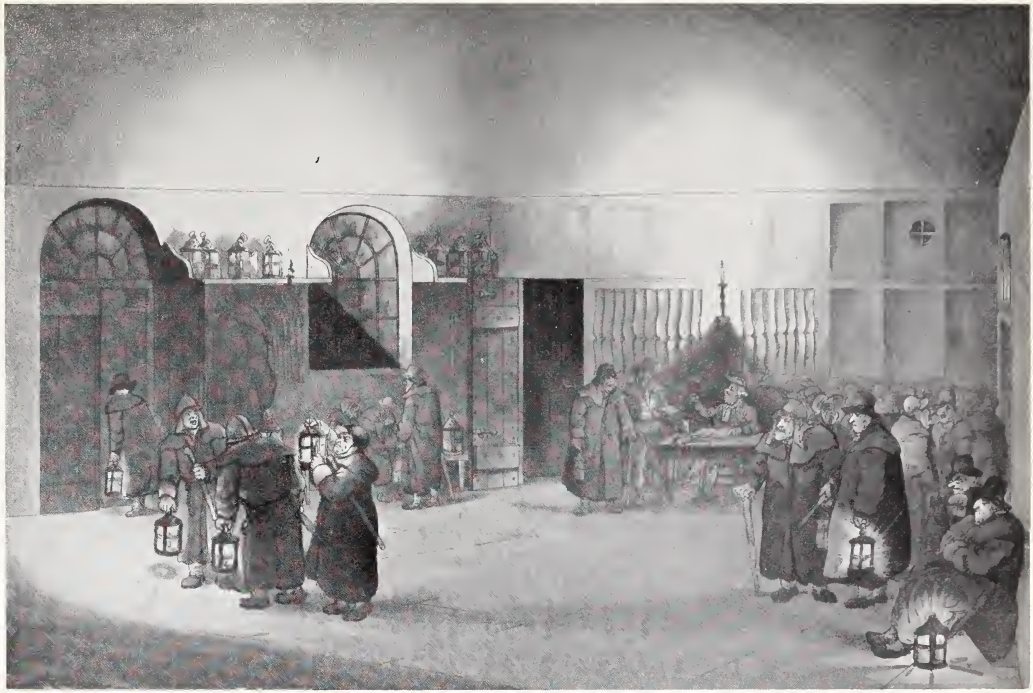
The Common Council, consisting of the Aldermen and Councillors, performs many of the functions of a town Council

PLATE 9



A WORKHOUSE IN LONDON, EARLY 19TH CENTURY

A place established by the parish where old men and women who could not find work for themselves could earn a living by sewing materials provided for them



THE WATCH HOUSE OF A LONDON PARISH, EARLY 19TH CENTURY

The Watch were the old men who patrolled the streets at night before Sir Robert Peel founded the Metropolitan Police in 1829. The Watch House was their headquarters—the forerunner of the modern police-station



PARISH OFFICERS, EARLY 19TH CENTURY

Beadles organizing the annual beating of the boundaries of a parish by children. This custom dates back to Anglo-Saxon times, and is still followed in a few parishes today. Its purpose was to make sure that the boundaries were remembered in the days before there were maps



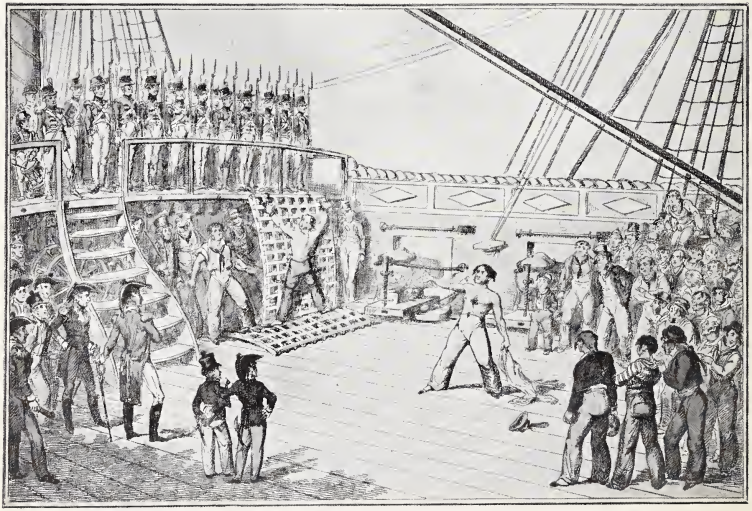
ELECTION OF A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR LAMBETH, 1865

This picture shows how members were elected before the Ballot Act of 1872. Hustings (the grandstand in the middle of the picture) were put up. From here the candidates spoke to the people, and here the voters recorded their votes in public

PLATE 13

PLATE 14







A GREAT TRADE-UNION VICTORY, 1889

The Amalgamated Society of Gas Workers and General Labourers invite their members and supporters in Birmingham to celebrate the limiting of their working day to eight hours. Note that the celebration had to be on a Sunday—the only day workmen had free before the First World War

Opposite :

Above : RECRUITING FOR THE ARMY, 1814

A recruiting sergeant persuading countrymen to join the army by describing the Duke of Wellington's victories in the war against Napoleon. Note the recruiting poster on the wall of the inn, 'The Lord Wellington'

Below : NAVAL DISCIPLINE, 1825

A seaman fastened to a grating and a boatswain's mate ready to flog him. Another sailor has stripped off his shirt and is offering to take the punishment instead. Notice the Royal Marines on the poop—a special kind of soldier carried in naval ships from the 17th century to the present day



H.M.S. *IMPLACABLE*

A typical pre-Dreadnought battleship, built about 1900. Displacement 15,000 tons. Armed with four 12-inch guns (one pair in the bow, one pair in the stern) and twelve 6-inch guns



H.M.S. *DREADNOUGHT*

The battleship of revolutionary design launched in 1906; all battleships built since have been based on this design. Displacement 18,000 tons, ten 12-inch guns in six double turrets, turbine engines giving a maximum speed of 22 knots

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